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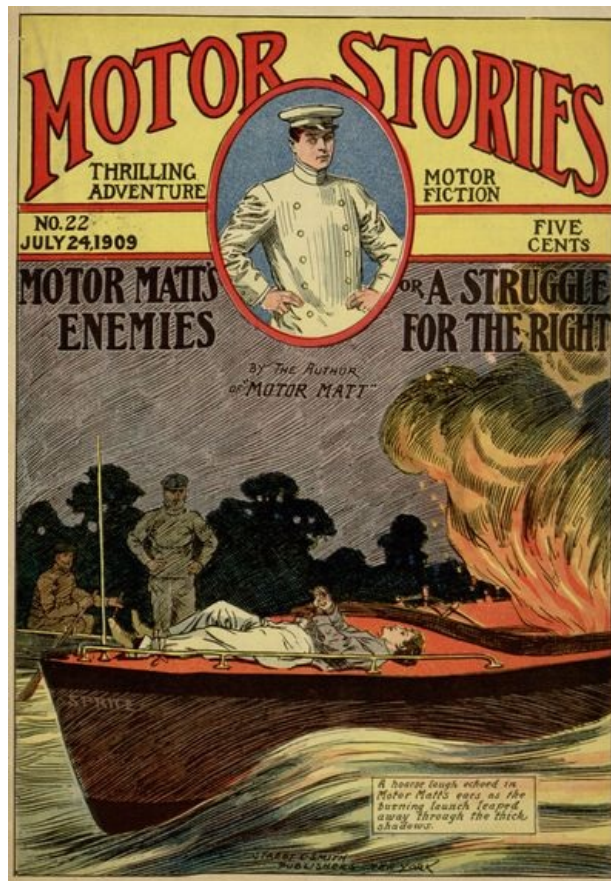
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MOTOR MATT'S ENEMIES; OR, A STRUGGLE FOR THE RIGHT ***



MOTOR STORIES

THRILLING ADVENTURE	MOTOR FICTION	
NO. 22		FIVE
JULY 24, 1909.		CENTS
MOTOR MATT'S ENEMIES	OR A STRUGGLE FOR THE RIGHT	
BY THE AUTHOR OF "MOTOR MATT"		

MOTOR STORIES
THRILLING ADVENTURE MOTOR FICTION

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OR,

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CHARACTERS THAT APPEAR IN THIS STORY.

Matt King, otherwise Motor Matt.

Joe McGlory, a young cowboy who proves himself a lad of worth and character, and whose eccentricities are all on the humorous side. A good chum to tie to—a point Motor Matt is quick to perceive.

George Lorry, a lad who has begun steering a wrong course, and in whom Matt recognizes a victim of circumstances rather than a youth who is innately conceited, domineering and unscrupulous.

Lorry, Sr., George's father; a rich man whose attitude toward Motor Matt, in part of the story, is as incomprehensible as it is uncalled-for.

Big John, an unscrupulous person who takes his dishonest toll wherever he can find it; but, in crossing Motor Matt's course, he meets with rather more than he has bargained for.

Kinky, a pal of Big John.

Ross, another pal of Big John; a desperate man with a grievance against Motor Matt.

Ollie Merton, a rich man's son with many failings, but rather deeper than he appears.

Pickereel Pete, a superstitious little moke who collects two dollars from Motor Matt for a day's work and abruptly resigns.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE ROAD TO WAUNAKEE.

"Do you know what you're doing, John?"

"If I didn't, Ollie, I wouldn't be doing it. I'm not one of these fellows who take a jump in the dark and trust to luck."

"Then it's about time you put me wise. I've been taking jumps in the dark ever since you showed up in Madison yesterday."

The man with the closely cropped red hair, the smooth face, and the mole on his cheek laughed softly.

"Back the car off the road and into the bushes," said he, "then we'll sit where we can look around the bend toward Waunakee and I'll tell you all you want to know."

The young fellow with black hair and a sinister face threw in the reverse and backed the big automobile off the road and into the undergrowth. When he stopped the car it was all but screened from sight. Jumping down, he walked out to where the man was standing in the highway thoughtfully smoking a big, black cigar.

Pulling a silver cigarette case from his pocket, Ollie helped himself to a highly ornamental brand of Turkish poison, each little cylinder cork-tipped and marked in gilt with his monogram.

Big John looked at him with frank disapproval as he took a silver matchbox from his vest and fired the imported "paper pipe."

"You're the silver-plated boy, all right," muttered Big John.

"Sterling, you big duffer," grinned Ollie. "Nothing plated about me."

"The dope they roll up in that rice paper and hand you with your cute little monogram is plate, all right—coffin plate—"

"Oh, splash!" sneered Ollie. "You're a nice one to lecture a fellow, I must say. Cut it out, John, and tell me what we're here for."

Big John shook his red head forebodingly and moved off toward the bend of the wooded road. Here he sat down just within a fringe of brush, in such a position that he had a good view of the straightaway stretch toward Waunakee, and Ollie pushed in beside him.

"You know George Lorry, all right, eh, Ollie?" Big John observed.

A flush crossed Ollie's sinister face.

"You bet I know him!" said he. "The fellows used to call him 'Sis,' because he was so nice and ladylike. But I've known for a long time there was good stuff in George, and that he'd be a first-rate chap if some one would only cut him adrift from his mother's apron strings. I got him started right," and a very complacent look drifted over Ollie's dark features. "He can smoke cigareets as well as the next one, now, and play as good a game of cards as any fellow in our set. He's got *me* to thank for that."

Big John stared at Ollie, and once more shook his head.

"What fools you kids can make of yourselves!" he grunted. "You're the one that started young Lorry, eh?"

"He was a sissy," asserted Ollie, "and I was making a man of him. George's folks never treated him right. Old Lorry has got as much money as my governor, but he's a tightwad, all right, and put the screws on George's allowance in a way that was scandalous. George bought a five-thousand-dollar motor launch, and had it sent on here from Bay City, C. O. D., and his skinflint father wouldn't foot the bill and the launch had to go back." Ollie fired up to a white heat. "What sort of a way was that for a man to treat his only son?" he demanded.

"Awful!" commented Big John sarcastically.

"George told me how he was treated," went on Ollie, failing to observe the sarcasm in Big John's voice, "and I advised him to break away and show the old folks that he wasn't going to let 'em tramp on him. He joined our club and got to be one of the best card players we have."

"Beautiful!" expanded Big John. "I suppose his folks were all cut up about that, eh?"

"I guess they were, only old Lorry took the wrong way of showing it. What do you think he did?" flared Ollie.

"I'm by. What did he do?"

"Why, he made arrangements to send George to one of these military academies, that's nothing

more or less than a reform school. George came to me and told me about it, and asked what he ought to do."

"And what did you tell him?"

"I told him to skip, and to take with him all the money of his father's that he could get his hands on. Old Lorry is a brute, and I didn't make any bones of telling George what I thought."

"And George skipped, taking ten thousand dollars from his father's safe," said Big John. "He went to Chicago first, then bought a ticket to 'Frisco. When he got there he had made friends with three men, and one of those men was me. I'm a villain, Ollie, and ought to be a horrible example to every young fellow who's got sense enough to know right from wrong, and the minute I learned Lorry had ten thousand dollars I planned with my two pals, Kinky and Ross, to get it. We'd have got away with it, too, on a boat to the Sandwich Islands, where I could have bought a pineapple plantation and, mebbe, have lived honest for the rest of my life, but something happened."

Big John looked through the bushes, out along the road, and scowled blackly.

"What happened?" demanded Ollie.

"A chap named Joe McGlory—"

"I've heard of *him*," interrupted Ollie. "He's a cousin of George's, and lives in Arizona. A cowboy and a rowdy—nothing refined or genteel in his make up. Go on."

"Well, McGlory got a message from young Lorry's father asking him to go to 'Frisco and hunt for George. McGlory went, but he'd never have found George in a thousand years if it hadn't been for some one else who butted into the game."

Big John scowled again, this time more fiercely than he had done before.

"Who was it?" queried Ollie.

"Hold your horses a minute," proceeded Big John. "McGlory and this other fellow took after Kinky, Ross, and me, and dropped on us like a thousand of brick. My, oh, my! Say, that other lad was the clear quill, all right. I've seen a good many likely youngers, but never one to match him. I guess you'd call him a 'sissy,' seeing as how he don't smoke, or drink, or gamble, but just trains his muscle to keep in form and cultivates his brain along the line of motors, gasoline motors. And muscle! Son, that fellow's got a 'right' any man would be proud to own, and what he don't know about chug-engines nobody knows."

Ollie's upper lip curled.

"I don't believe in paragons," said he. "But what has all this got to do with our being here?"

"I'm getting to that. With this young fellow's help, McGlory got the ten thousand away from us; not only that, but we had to get out of 'Frisco on the jump to keep the law from layin' hold of us. But Big John wasn't throwing his hands in the air, not as anybody knows of. I knew what would happen. Young Lorry would have to be brought back to Madison, and this motor boy would have to help McGlory bring him back. Also, the ten thousand dollars would be brought back—and I was still yearnin' for that money and the pineapple plantation. I had Ross dodge back to 'Frisco and watch. When McGlory and the other chap took the cars with Lorry, Ross was on the same train, but he had changed himself so no one would have known him. Ross is good at that sort of thing, and that's the reason I made him do the shadowin'. Kinky and me hurried right on to Madison, where I called on you and reminded you of the way I'd once given you a tip on a hoss race in New York and helped you win a thousand. You remembered old times"—Big John grinned widely—"and you wasn't leery of me."

"I always liked you, Big John," averred the misguided youth, "because you're so free and easy."

"Thanks," was the dry response. "Well, to proceed," he went on, "Ross dropped in on Kinky and me, last night, and said that young Lorry and t'other two hadn't come to Madison, but had got off the train at Waunakee and had gone to a little cabin on the bank of a creek that empties into the Catfish. Ross hung around the cabin, listenin', until he found out that one of the outfit was to walk into Madison, this morning, to have a talk with Mr. Lorry. I don't know what the talk's to be about, but this motor boy must have something up his sleeve." Big John gave an ill-omened grin. "As near as I can find out from Ross," he continued, "this chug-engine chap thinks he can make a man out o' Lorry—but he's going about it a little different from what you did, Ollie. Now, I don't care a whoop about anything but that money, and I rather believe I've fixed things so the motor boy won't have easy sailin' with Mr. Lorry. But that's neither here nor there. I got you to bring me out here in your benzine buggy, this mornin', so I could lay for the chap that goes into town and take the ten thousand. After I get it, you're to take me to Dane, or Lodi, or Barraboo, and leave me there. That'll settle the debt you owe me on account of the tip I gave you on that hoss race, see? Are you willin'?"

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The sinister face of the youth glowed with a fierce light.

"I'm willing to help you get away, Big John," he answered, "and I'm even willing to help you get the money. This motor boy you speak about is trying to undermine my influence with George, and, by Jupiter, I won't have it. I know what's the best thing for George."

"We won't talk about that part of it," said Big John, who was a strange mixture of right principles and evil actions, "because I might say something you wouldn't like. As I was saying, I've got my heart set on an honest life and a pineapple plantation, and ten thousand ain't any more to Lorry,

the millionaire, than ten cents is to me. I'm going to get that money—and here's where I turn the trick. You can go farther back into the bushes and watch, for I don't need your help."

Unbuttoning his coat, Big John began unwrapping coil after coil of light rope from around his waist. When he was through he had a thirty-foot riata in his left hand and was holding the noose in his right.

Ollie, who had never been the confederate of a man before in such a rascally piece of work, stared with wide eyes at Big John; then, before pushing farther back into the brush, he turned his eyes down the wooded road.

A young fellow, lithely built, and with the grace and freedom of movement that marks the perfect athlete, was swinging toward the bend from the direction of Waunakee.

"Is that McGlory?" asked Ollie in a whisper.

"Nary it ain't McGlory," replied Big John, with a snap of the jaws. "It's Matt King, otherwise Motor Matt, and here's where he gets what's comin' for meddlin' in affairs that's none of his business. Get back, I tell you, and give me a free hand."

CHAPTER II.

INTO A NOOSE—AND OUT OF IT AGAIN.

Motor Matt, swinging along the road toward Madison, that morning, was particularly light-hearted. He and his new chum, Joe McGlory, had accomplished something worth while; and whenever a young fellow does that he is pretty sure to be on good terms with himself.

The long railroad journey from San Francisco to a point within a few miles of Madison had been safely accomplished. Young Lorry had not been a willing traveler, at first, but Matt had gradually won him over by suggesting a plan which carried an appeal to Lorry's heart. This plan had to do with the three boys leaving the train at Waunakee, taking to the little cabin in the woods, and then Lorry and McGlory staying there while Matt went on to the city for a talk with the elder Lorry and to deliver the ten thousand dollars.

Motor Matt and McGlory had had some exciting experiences with Big John and his two pals, Kinky and Ross, but those experiences had been passed through safely, and the end of the journey, if not of Matt's work, was in sight.

Matt had faith to believe that there was "good stuff" in George Lorry. The boy had fled from Madison, and had committed a dishonest act before doing so. Having far and away too much pride for his own good, the thought of being brought back, virtually under guard and in disgrace, was more than he could bear. Matt had tried to think of a plan for giving Lorry's return a different look—hence the reason for McGlory and Lorry remaining in the cabin while Matt went on to the city.

The morning was fresh, the sun was bright, and the clear weather seemed a good augury for what lay before. Matt always made it a point to look on the bright side of things, anyway.

Ahead of him lay a bend in the road. When he rounded the bend he felt sure that he would be able to catch a glimpse of the white dome of the capitol, and from that point onward he would not be long in covering the ground.

He halted abruptly just before he got to the bend. The peculiar corrugated marks of automobile tires lay under his eyes in the dust of the road. It wasn't so much the marks themselves that claimed his attention as the strange way they curved from the roadside and entered the brush. Why should an automobile be taking to the woods in that unaccountable fashion?

From ahead of him, around the bend, he heard a car. The car was on the move, plainly enough, but the motor was in distress, pounding badly; not only that, but there was a smell of fried engine in the air, as though some reckless driver were burning up his transmission.

Was the car Matt heard the one that had left its tracks there by the roadside? He presumed that this must be the case; so, instead of investigating the bushes, he started to run around the bend. If he could help the injured car, then perhaps the driver might give him a lift the rest of the way into town.

As he started on, after a moment's pause, a sinuous, snakelike thing leaped noiselessly from the bushes behind him, unwound itself in the air, and a loop fell over his head and dropped on his shoulders.

Motor Matt jumped as though he had been touched with a live wire. He half turned and lifted his hands to remove the coil, but it tightened before he could free himself, and a rough jerk from behind landed him on his back in the dust.

Matt had not been expecting such lawlessness on that peaceable country road. Who was back of it, and what was the purpose?

To escape, half-strangled as he was and with enemies bearing down on him, was out of the question—at that moment. The lad's resourcefulness suggested a trick, whereby he hoped to gain time and discover a chance for escape.

Although the fall backward had not injured him in the least, yet he gave a groan, tried to lift himself, and then fell back and lay still and silent.

In his ears the pounding of the motor around the bend continued to echo, but, from the noise, he could not discover that the car was coming in his direction. A quick tramp of feet and a rustle of bushes were heard, and two figures bounded to his side. One of the figures was that of a man, and the other of a well-dressed, dissipated-looking youth.

Matt, peering from half-closed eyes, could scarcely restrain an exclamation at sight of the man. When he had seen the man last, in San Francisco Bay, he had worn a red beard. Although the beard was gone, Matt recognized the scoundrel instantly—and the mole served to make his identification complete.

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"Confound it, John!" grumbled the youth, "*now* what have you done? If he's badly hurt——"

Big John laughed.

"Hurt! Motor Matt badly hurt by a little drop like that! Why, he's tougher'n whalebone and you couldn't damage him with a sledge hammer. He's just stunned and strangled, that's all. A good thing for me, too, because he'll never know who roped him and we can get away before he comes to himself. Pull out that noose so he can breathe, Ollie. I'll get what I want out of the younker's pocket and——"

"There's another machine!" Ollie muttered, staring toward the bend as he was about to stoop over Matt and release the noose.

"Just heard it?" answered Big John. "Well, don't let it worry you. I've heard it for some time, and it's coming into this road from a branch and is bound for town. Look sharp, now, for we've got to hustle."

While Ollie, with trembling fingers, pulled out the loop and drew it over Matt's head, Big John went down on one knee to search his pockets.

Matt knew, then, what Big John was after. The rascal was foolish enough to think Matt was carrying Lorry's money in cash. This was not the case, for Matt and McGlory had bought a draft in San Francisco. Matt, however, did not intend to lose even the draft.

Suddenly, and most unexpectedly, he became very much alive. With a quick move he hoisted himself upward, catching Ollie by the shoulders and hurling him, with terrific force, against Big John.

Both the youth and the man were caught at a disadvantage. Ollie gave a startled cry as he carromed against Big John, and the latter, as he staggered back, said something more forcible than polite.

As for Matt, if he had any comments to make, he preferred to send them by mail. Without hesitating an instant, he took to his heels and tore around the bend.

He could see the dome of the capitol, far off and embowered by trees, but he was thinking more, at that moment, of the other car than he was of the capitol.

A hundred yards ahead was another road, coming from the timber into the one he was following. The moment Matt raced around the bend a swagger little runabout was jumping from one road into the other.

The car was not *headed* toward Madison, although it was proceeding in that direction. It was on the reverse gear, and a young woman in the driver's seat was craning her head around in order to see the way and do the guiding.

There was only the young woman in the car, and Matt, in spite of his dangerous situation, felt a distinct sense of disappointment. He had been hoping to meet a man, in that emergency, and now to meet a young woman——

But he had no time to waste in vain regrets. A look over his shoulder showed him Big John hurrying after him at top speed.

Matt knew that Big John was one of those lawless persons who carry weapons in their hip pockets, and, although Matt's legs could outdistance Big John's, the young motorist would hardly be able to keep ahead of a bullet.

But Big John held his hand and determined to trust to his sprinting ability. To use a revolver would, perhaps, have carried the matter farther than he wanted to see it go.

Besides, Ollie was cranking up the big car and making ready to bring it along in pursuit.

The smell of sizzling engine became stronger as Matt drew closer to the runabout. The girl, with a very white face, had turned in her seat and was staring toward Matt with startled eyes. At the same moment she had brought the car to a stop.

Big John, on seeing Matt draw abreast of the runabout, halted and looked around for Ollie and the touring car.

"Will you give me a ride into Madison?" Matt asked of the girl, as respectfully as he could in the circumstances.

"What's—what's the matter?" asked the girl.

"That fellow, back there, tried to rob me. I don't think he will follow me far, on a public highway in broad daylight—if you will let me ride in the runabout."

"But the bearings are chewed up!" cried the girl; "I'm going home on the reverse."

"Take the other seat, please," said Matt. "I know something about motors, and perhaps I can handle the car so as to get more speed out of it with less rack on the engine."

Without a word the girl changed to the other seat and Matt leaped into the car beside her.

The next moment he had advanced the spark, thrown in the high-speed clutch, and they were shooting down a long slope.

Matt's eyes were behind, and the girl's in front of her.

"Oh, hurry, hurry!" she cried, in a frightened voice. "They've got a big touring car, and I don't think anything can keep them from overtaking us!"

CHAPTER III.

GEORGE'S SISTER.

Matt threw a look over his shoulder. Big John was just making a flying leap to the running board of a large car. He fell aboard in a huddle, colliding with the dash and striking violently against his young companion, who was at the steering wheel.

Matt was not able to look longer. By doing wonders with the spark and the steering wheel, and by ignoring the bubbling in the radiator and the pounding of the engine, he nursed the runabout along at a good rate of speed. A low hill was before them, and it came near killing the car, but when they had reached the crest and were ready for the descent on the other side, an exclamation from the girl drew his attention.

"What is it?" he asked. "Is that other car close upon us?"

"Something has gone wrong with the other automobile," was the answer. "When that man jumped aboard he must have injured something."

Matt looked around again. Big John and his companion were on the ground, looking over their car and trying to locate the trouble.

Matt laughed.

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"It's a good thing for those fellows that the car went wrong," said he. "In their excitement they might have done something that would have got them both into trouble. We'll go on for a little way and then I'll have a look at the runabout and see if I can't fix it up so we can run headfirst, like every respectable automobile ought to run."

They coasted down the hill, and the tired and much abused motor must have appreciated the rest.

"Is this your car?" asked Matt.

"Yes," was the reply. "I don't think you can fix it, for I've stripped the gear."

"I'll look at it, anyway, if you don't mind, just as soon as we get to the bottom of this slope. I've had a lot of experience with motors."

"You say that man tried to rob you?" queried the girl.

"That's the way it looked to me, but it seemed like an audacious thing to attempt so near a big city like Madison. You see, I was walking into town, and back there at the bend in the road some one threw a rope and I got tangled in the noose and thrown off my feet. I managed to get away, though, and the man took after me. If it hadn't been for you, that other car might have overhauled me. I'm much obliged to you, miss."

"I'm glad I was able to help you," was the quiet reply. "As you say, it is strange any one should try to commit a robbery, in broad daylight, so close to the city. And on a public highway, too!"

By then they were at the foot of the slope and Matt brought the car to a halt. Here he got out and turned to the girl.

"If you'll jump down for a minute," said he, "I'll give that transmission a sizing and see if I can do anything with it."

"But won't the other car come?" she demurred.

"Those fellows will think better of it. If they hadn't been excited they wouldn't have tried to chase me. They've had time to cool off, now, and to think better of what they're doing."

Matt helped the girl down, and, for the first time, saw that she was very young and very pretty. There was a familiar cast to her features, somehow, which aroused his wonder. Was it possible that he had ever met her before?

Without trying very hard to answer this mental question, he stripped off the transmission cover and thrust a hand inside.

The metal band encircling the low-gear drum had sustained a fracture. It was made of bronze, and had been slotted for convenience in lubricating, and the break was through two of the slots.

"The low gear is chewed up," he remarked to the girl, "and that part of the machine is

permanently retired. I guess we'll have to go into Madison on the reverse, and it will be well to go slow so as not to overheat the engine. We can take care of that, all right, if we stop occasionally to cool off. How far are we from town, by the way?"

"Not more than two miles from Sherman Avenue and Lake Mendota."

"We'll get over that quick enough. You don't mind my riding with you?"

"I'm glad to have you," was the smiling reply. "You'll save me from twisting my head off and doing all the work."

Matt, with his gray, earnest eyes and fine face, was a well-favored lad, and it is not to be wondered at if the girl was impressed.

"Are you a stranger in this part of the country?" the girl inquired, when they were once more in their seats and backing away in the direction of town.

"Yes," he replied. "Never been in these parts before."

"You were walking into town, you say?"

The girl eyed his neat, trim figure with a certain amount of surprise.

"I was," he answered, with a laugh, "but please don't think I'm a tramp. I've a draft for ten thousand dollars in my pocket—and tramps are not usually as well fixed as that. The fellow who roped me must have known about that ten thousand, and perhaps he was foolish enough to think that I had it in cash."

"Ten thousand dollars!" murmured the girl. "That's a lot of money."

Evidently it was not such a vast sum—to her. That swagger little car, as Matt figured it, was given to her for her very own, and she was wearing the latest thing in automobile coats, hats, and gauntlets. The dust coat had become parted at the throat and revealed a fraternity pin set with a big diamond.

"After I take your car to the garage," said Matt, "perhaps you could tell me where I can find Mr. Daniel Lorry?"

The girl started.

"Why," she exclaimed, "if we get to the garage about noon you will find dad in the house in the same yard. He's my father. I'm Ethel Lorry."

"Great spark-plugs!" exclaimed Matt. "I guess this is my lucky day, after all. You're George's sister, are you?"

A cry escaped the girl, and she reached out to drop a convulsive hand on Matt's arm.

"You know George?" she asked breathlessly.

"I should say so!" returned Matt.

"Where is he?" The girl was tremendously excited. "Is he well? Has he come back from San Francisco?"

"Yes, Miss Lorry, he is back from San Francisco, and he's feeling tiptop. But he didn't want to come to Madison just yet. I left him not more than an hour ago. His cousin, Joe McGlory, is with him."

"But why didn't he want to come home?" cried the girl, with vague alarm in her voice.

"I'm to see your father and tell him about that. That's what I was coming to town for."

The girl suddenly whitened, a frightened look arose in her eyes, and she drew as far away from Matt as she could.

"What's the matter, Miss Lorry?" Matt asked.

"Are you—can it be that you are the young man called Motor Matt?"

"That's what I'm called. My real name is King, you know, Matt King, but I'm always doing something with motors and that's why they call me Motor Matt."

The girl was silent for a space. Her face continued white, and she seemed to be thinking deeply.

"I think, Motor Matt," she said finally, in a strained voice, "that you'd better get out of the car and let me run it back to Madison alone."

Matt was "stumped." For a moment, so great was his astonishment, he could not do a thing but stare.

"Why," he exclaimed, "I want to see your father; that's why I'm going into town this morning."

"I think it will be better for you if you don't see him."

Matt's bewilderment continued to increase.

"I've got ten thousand dollars for him, and also a message from George," he managed to articulate.

"You can give me the money and the message, Mr. Motor Matt," was the terse reply, "and I will see that they are delivered."

Matt halted the car—it was time to cool off the engine a little, anyway—and straightened in his seat.

"I am a friend of your brother's," he observed, "and Joe McGlory will tell you what I have tried to do for him. Your father sent a telegram to San Francisco asking McGlory to have me come with him and George, if possible. Now, at a good deal of inconvenience and expense to myself, I have come—and why shouldn't I see your father?"

"Because," answered Miss Lorry steadily, "he has recently heard something about you that—that is not to your credit. If you insist on seeing him, he might—he might have you arrested."

If Matt was "stumped" before, he was staggered now. Arrested! George Lorry's father might have him arrested! And for what? For helping George recover the ten thousand dollars, and for helping to bring George back to Madison?

"There's a big mistake, somewhere," muttered Matt.

"You'll not go on?" queried Miss Lorry.

"I *will* go on," Matt returned firmly. "But I'll get out of the car and walk, if you want it that way, Miss Lorry. I can't give the money to you, or the message, either. As I say, there's a mistake, and I must see your father and explain away the bad impression he has of me. Certainly he didn't get that from Joe McGlory."

"I don't know who told him what he knows," went on the girl, "and I don't know *what* he knows, but he's very much incensed against you, Motor Matt."

"I'll know why, before I'm many hours older," and Matt got up to leave the car.

Once more the girl caught his arm.

"I'm glad you show that sort of spirit," said she. "If you are really determined to see dad, and have a talk with him, then that proves on the face of it that there must be some mistake. Please stay and take the car into town for me!"

Without a word, but with his mind working hard to evolve some clue to this puzzling situation, Matt dropped back in the driver's seat. He threw in the switch, and the gas in the cylinders took the spark. But it was a silent ride that he and Miss Lorry had during the rest of the time they were backing into town.

CHAPTER IV.

THE "JUMP SPARK."

Into the grounds of one of the finest homes on "Fourth Lake Ridge," otherwise known as "Aristocracy Hill," Matt backed the little runabout. A brick-paved roadway, overarched with trees, led from the front of the premises to the neat garage in the rear.

A middle-aged gentleman, stout of build and with a florid face, was sitting on the veranda of the house. The runabout, worrying backward up the street and into the yard, was an astonishing sight. The middle-aged gentleman leaned against the rail and stared; then, waving a newspaper which he held in his hand, he shouted something and hurried down the steps and toward the driveway.

"Dad!" murmured Miss Lorry, with an apprehensive glance at Matt.

A man—probably the Lorry chauffeur—appeared in the open door of the garage and stared at the runabout in open-mouthed amazement.

Matt brought the car to a stop, and Mr. Lorry came puffing up alongside.

"What in the world's the matter, Ethel?" he demanded, his eyes swerving from his daughter to Matt.

"I smashed the low gear, dad, and had to come in on the reverse," Miss Lorry answered. "I was just coming into the Waunakee road, two or three miles the other side of Maple Bluff, when the gear went wrong."

Mr. Lorry's eyes continued to rest on Matt, and they were becoming uncomfortably inquisitive. He was wondering, no doubt, who Matt was, how he came to be in the car, and why his daughter did not introduce him.

"Call Gus," went on Miss Lorry, jumping lightly out of the car, "and have him run *Dandy* into the garage. Gus will know what to send for in order to make the runabout as good as new again."

Without waiting to speak further, the girl whirled about and ran into the house. Mr. Lorry stared after her, and then turned to give Matt another look.

"Are you a chauffeur?" he asked.

"I have been—a racing chauffeur," Matt answered, springing to the ground, "but I haven't been driving a car for some time."

"You helped my daughter—that much is plain, even though I *have* been left in the dark on several other points."

"I was coming into town along the Waunakee road," Matt went on, "to see you."

"To see me?" Mr. Lorry's interest visibly increased.

"Yes, sir, on very important business. I happened to meet Miss Lorry and she kindly gave me a ride into town. The least I could do was to run her machine for her."

"Did you know Miss Lorry?"

"Not until she told me who she was."

"Quite a coincidence that you should meet her, when you were coming into town to see her father. But come up on the veranda—we'll be more comfortable there." Mr. Lorry turned toward the garage. "The runabout's in trouble, Gus," he called. "Take it into the garage, see what it needs, then order whatever's necessary. This way, sir," he added to Matt.

While Gus removed the runabout to the garage, Matt followed Mr. Lorry up the steps to the veranda and seated himself in a chair.

"I don't remember ever seeing you before," remarked Mr. Lorry as he sat down close to Matt, picked up a fan, and began stirring the air in front of his perspiring face. "But I'm obliged to you for giving Ethel a helping hand. I'm worried to death every time she's out with *Dandy*. It wasn't more than a week ago that she came near going over a bluff at McBride's Point."

Matt lost no time in plunging into his business. Drawing the draft from his pocket, he handed it to Mr. Lorry.

"Part of my work," said he, "is to give you that."

Mr. Lorry stared at the draft and opened his eyes wide.

"Ten thousand dollars!" he exclaimed, "and it's made payable to Joseph McGlory."

"On the back, sir, you will see that Joe had indorsed it over to you."

Mr. Lorry turned over the oblong slip of paper; then, suddenly, an idea darted through his mind and he stiffened in his chair.

"Is this—is this——"

"It is the money George took when he left Madison," said Matt, dropping his voice.

Mr. Lorry's face hardened.

"Then," said he raspingly, "inasmuch as you're not McGlory, I suppose you're that young rascal, Matt King, better known as Motor Matt."

"My name is Matt King, sir," answered Matt, "and you have no right to refer to me as a rascal."

"I have, by gad," exploded Mr. Lorry, "and a very good right! I've heard about you, sir. You're the lad who was hand-and-glove with the three villains who made George so much trouble on account of this money. I wonder that you have the face to show yourself to me. Do you know what I could do with you?"

A hostile red had leaped into Mr. Lorry's face. As Matt sat back and looked at him, he likened his anger to a "jump spark."

The "make and break" system of ignition, while electrically simple, is complicated mechanically. The "jump spark" system, on the other hand, while complicated electrically is mechanically very simple.

A simple error of some sort lay back of Mr. Lorry's anger, but it found vent in mighty puzzling expressions.

"Who is your authority for the statement that I was hand-and-glove with the three men who robbed George?" asked Matt calmly.

"I decline to quote anybody."

"You can ask McGlory, or George, about me," proceeded Matt, "and I think they will tell you that if it hadn't been for me that money would never have been recovered."

"You have pulled the wool over McGlory's eyes, and over George's, too. But where's my son? Why didn't he bring this money to me himself? Why was it necessary for him to send it at the hands of a stranger?"

"Your son is a few miles out of town. He did not leave San Francisco willingly, and it was only by promising him that we would not take him directly into Madison that we got his consent to come with us."

"A fine lay-out!" muttered Mr. Lorry. "The boy's got to come here, sooner or later, and what is he to gain by delaying the matter? Can't he realize how worried all of us are?"

"He feels the disgrace of his position very keenly, Mr. Lorry."

"Bosh! Not much of what he's done is known to outsiders, and those who know, or think they know, anything about it, will forget the whole business within a week after George gets back."

"Are you going to send George to military school, Mr. Lorry?"

At that the "jump spark" seemed about to set off an explosion. Mr. Lorry twisted angrily in his chair.

"What business is it of yours, young man?" he snapped. "That boy has got to realize that he isn't of age yet, and I'm not going to let him run wild and bring disgrace on himself, and on me."

"Mr. Lorry," said Matt earnestly, "I have tried to be a good friend to your son, and it was your

request, contained in the telegram you sent to San Francisco, that I come with him and McGlory, that brought me here. I won't tell you what I have done—I will leave that to George and his cousin—but I will tell you, as plainly as I can, that George is just now in a place where he must be treated with consideration. One false move would prove his ruin, and——"

"By gad," interrupted Mr. Lorry, "do you mean to sit there and lecture *me*? Why, I'm old enough to be your father! Such impudence as that is——"

"Sir," protested Matt, "I'm not impudent. I know George pretty well, and I want to do what I can for him. He's got lots of pride, and he had his heart set on getting a power-boat that would make a good showing in the coming race of the Winnequa Yacht Club. He had talked about what he was going to do to members of the club, and when he ordered that boat and you refused to pay for it and let it be sent back to the builders, the blow to his pride started him off on the wrong course."

"A five-thousand-dollar boat, by gad!" growled Mr. Lorry. "His whims were getting too confoundedly expensive. If his pride is going to suffer every time I put my foot down on such a piece of folly, then he'll have to pocket his pride. I'm his father, and I guess he'll have to toe the mark for me for a while yet."

"There's a way to make George the happiest fellow in Madison, Mr. Lorry," Matt went on, "and it won't cost you more than two hundred and fifty or three hundred dollars. I know a good deal about motors, and I'll help George fix up a boat that will win a prize in that yacht club race——"

"Not a cent more will he get from me!" stormed Mr. Lorry. "He'll come back here, and he'll go to that military school, and if what you call his 'pride' keeps him from being a dutiful son, then his pride will be broken. Where is he? Where did you leave him?"

"If you go out to where he is now, without first giving him a chance to——"

Mr. Lorry leaned forward and shook a finger in Matt's face.

"If you want to keep yourself out of trouble, my lad, you'll tell me where that boy is, and no more ifs nor ands about it."

Matt got up slowly. He was white, but none the less determined.

"I am George's friend, Mr. Lorry," said he, "and I had to promise him that I would help him do certain things here in Madison in order to get him safely back from the West. If I tell you where he is, while you feel as you do toward him, I would be breaking my promise. He is well, and he will be here in a few days. As for the rest, if you want to make trouble for me, why, go ahead."

Intensely disappointed with the result of his interview, Matt passed down the steps and toward the street. Mr. Lorry gasped wrathfully and watched as he left the yard, but he made no attempt to interfere with him.

Matt was hardly out of sight, however, before he ran into the house and began using the telephone.

CHAPTER V.

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BY EXPRESS, CHARGES COLLECT.

Motor Matt was surprised enough, as he left the Lorry mansion, and his indignation equaled his surprise.

Who could possibly have furnished Lorry with the information on which he had based his remarkable conclusions? Certainly his attitude had changed most decidedly since he had sent his telegram to 'Frisco requesting that Matt accompany McGlory in bringing George home to Madison.

Matt, as he descended the ridge and proceeded toward the capitol and the main part of the town, could think of only one possible cause for Mr. Lorry's actions. Big John must be in some way mixed up in it.

The knowledge that Big John was in that part of the country had come like a thunderbolt to Matt. The last the king of the motor boys had heard of Big John, he and his two pals, Kinky and Ross, were getting out of California by way of Sausalito. A bolt from the blue could not have been more astounding than the discovery of Big John attempting a robbery there on the Waunakee road.

Why had Big John come to Madison? And how had he known that Matt was going to pass that particular point on the Waunakee road that morning?

No doubt Big John's eastern trip had been inspired by the ten thousand dollars of Lorry's. The rascal had been lured to Wisconsin by the hope of recovering the money. This seemed clear enough—much clearer than the method by which Big John had learned that Matt was to go over the Waunakee road that morning, on foot.

Yes, Big John must have been back of that misinformation which Mr. Lorry had accepted as a true statement of facts. But it was odd how the scoundrel had been able to influence Mr. Lorry as he had.

Motor Matt felt that he was embarked on a struggle for the right, and that he must go on with the

battle in spite of his enemies. George Lorry's whole future might hang on the result of that fight.

Had Matt told Mr. Lorry where McGlory and George were waiting, the millionaire would certainly have proceeded to the place and attempted to bring George in to Madison. This would have led George to believe that Matt had broken faith with him, and the lad would have bolted for parts unknown.

George had been allowed to have his way for so long that, when his father took another tack and resolved to be severe with him, the lad had thought himself abused and imposed upon. George was a spoiled youth, but Matt believed that he had the right material in him and would prove a credit to his people if given the proper kind of a chance. Just as surely, too, he would go down to ruin and disgrace if the wrong move was made at that critical time.

Lorry, senior's, obstinate determination to send George to the military school would be a step in the wrong direction. By paying out a little money for a motor launch, Mr. Lorry would have gone far toward healing the breach between him and his son, and would have paved the way for a perfect understanding. This affair of the launch looked like a trifling matter, but no one but Matt and McGlory knew how much it meant to George.

When Matt reached the main part of the city his study of the situation had convinced him that he was doing exactly right. What his next step was to be he hardly knew. He hated to go back and tell George of his father's uncompromising attitude, and yet he felt the need of a talk with McGlory in order to lay future plans.

It was about one o'clock, and Matt went into a restaurant and ate his dinner. From there he went to the post office to see if any mail had followed him from San Francisco.

No mail had reached him from the West, but there was a postal card, posted that morning in Madison, which informed Matt that a certain express company had received, and was holding at his risk, a crated power boat on which there was a charge, for *transportation alone*, of \$262.50.

When Matt read the postal card he was positive there was some mistake, and that it had been given to the wrong person. The card was addressed, plainly enough, to "Matt King, otherwise Motor Matt," but the king of the motor boys was not expecting a launch, had not ordered one, and was not intending to turn over \$262.50 to the express company on what was manifestly an error.

He was on the point of handing the card back to the man at the post-office window, with the information that the card could not be for him, when he suddenly changed his mind and decided to go to the express company's office and rectify the mistake at headquarters.

A little inquiry put him on the right road, and within five minutes he was leaning over a counter at the express office, showing the clerk the card and telling him the boat must be for some other Matt King.

"There's no other Matt King in Madison," protested the clerk, "and it's a cinch there's no other Motor Matt. You're the fellow the boat is for."

"But that charge!" exclaimed Matt. "It can't be for transportation alone. It must be a C. O. D. collection for part of the price of the boat. I haven't bought any boat, and am not expecting any one to send me a boat. I'm a stranger here, and only reached Madison to-day."

"Can't help that. If you're Motor Matt the boat's for you. If you refuse it we'll have to notify the shipper, and if we can't get any satisfaction from the shipper, the boat will have to be sold for the charges."

"Great spark-plugs!" muttered Matt. "Where's the boat from?"

"San Francisco."

The king of the motor boys stared blankly at the clerk.

"From San Francisco, eh?" he repeated.

"Yes, and it's all complete—an eighteen-footer, with engine installed."

"Can—can I see it?"

"Come this way."

The clerk opened a gate at the end of the counter and Matt walked through and into the storeroom. There he saw the boat, securely crated. Between the bars of the crate he read the name *Sprite*, lettered on the bow.

By that time the king of the motor boys was too far gone for words. Leaning against the wall of the room, he bent his head and drummed a tattoo on his brow with his fingers.

"Who's the shipper?" he finally managed to ask.

"I don't know whether the way bill has it right or not, but the name of the consignor is down as Ping Pong. It reads like a joke. Eh?"

Matt left the room and retired to the other side of the counter in the office.

There was no joke about it. "Ping Pong" might look to the express agent like a fake name, but it was *bona fide* for all that.

Ping Pong was the name of a Chinese lad whom Matt had befriended in San Francisco. The Celestial had won the *Sprite* in a raffle, and had turned the boat over to Matt on condition that

Matt would allow Ping Pong to work for him. Ping and the *Sprite* had disappeared mysteriously before the young motorist left 'Frisco, and that was the last seen of either the Chinaman or the boat until now. And here the boat had turned up in that Madison office of the express company with transportation charges of \$262.50 to be collected!

The idea of sending a power boat, engine and all, by express, in a heavy crate, was a piece of folly of which even a ten-year-old American boy would not have been guilty. But Ping was a Chinaman, and probably he thought Matt was a millionaire.

"Goin' to take it or leave it?" inquired the agent as Matt walked back and forth across the office turning this new development over in his mind. "The charges ain't any more than what they always are—three times the merchandise rate."

"I guess the charges are all right," said Matt humorously, "for it's a long haul. And then, too, the crate, and the engine, and the boat weigh up to beat the band."

"Going to take it?"

Matt's mind had been rapidly going over the points of the case. Madison was surrounded by lakes, and motor-boating was a hobby with a large number of the people. By sending the *Sprite* to Matt, Ping had undoubtedly determined that he should have the boat. The *Sprite* was speedy—Matt had tried her out in San Francisco Bay and knew that—and with some changes in the reversing gear Matt believed she could show her heels to anything from First Lake to Fourth. On such a showing, the boat could undoubtedly be sold at a good price, and while \$262.50 was a big sum to pay out, just for express charges, still—

Then Matt had another thought, and it was a "startler." George wanted a motor boat for the race. The *Sprite* wasn't a five-thousand-dollar "speeder," but she could run like a streak with the right kind of a fellow at the engine. Mr. Lorry had refused to help George to a boat, and this unexpected arrival of the *Sprite* seemed almost providential.

"I'm going to take the boat," said Matt, pushing a hand into his pocket and stepping up to the counter.

CHAPTER VI.

"PICKEREL PETE."

By bringing the submarine boat *Grampus* safely around South America the king of the motor boys had made a good deal of money. Most of this he had invested on the Pacific Slope, but he had more than enough of the "ready" with him to settle the express charges and to keep him afloat until George Lorry's affairs had been put in proper shape.

Having paid over the money and signed the express receipt, the question as to what should be done with the *Sprite* presented itself.

"You can uncrate the boat in the storeroom, if you want to," said the obliging clerk, "and then we'll have her hauled down to the water for you."

"Much obliged," answered Matt. "I believe I'll take off the crate and see how the boat has stood her long overland journey."

The clerk furnished him with a hatchet, and Matt threw off his coat and got busy. In an hour, the clean-cut hull of the *Sprite* had emerged from a litter of boards and old gunny sacks. An examination showed that both hull and machinery were in as good condition as ever.

While Matt was working he had noticed a map of Madison hanging from the storeroom wall. The map gave a very clear idea of Lakes Monona and Mendota, between which lay the long and narrow city.

One of the express company's drivers had come into the storeroom and was looking over the *Sprite* with an air of deep interest.

"I wish you would tell me something about this map, neighbor," said Matt.

"Ask me anything you want to," was the cheerful response. "I was born and raised here and I know the place pretty well."

"What's this?" Matt inquired, laying a finger on a certain part of the diagram.

"That's the Yahara River, sometimes called the 'Catfish.' It's been straightened into a canal, and connects Third and Fourth Lakes. Monona is Third, and Mendota is Fourth. There's locks at the Mendota end."

"And what's the other river coming into Mendota Lake on the side across from the city?"

"The Yahara again."

"Then, if this boat was launched in Lake Monona, it could enter the Canal over by Winnequa, cross into Mendota Lake, and proceed up the Yahara?"

"She could, sure. Lots of boats do that."

"Here's a creek entering the Yahara. Is that navigable for a boat drawing two or three feet of water?"

"Maybe. I guess a small boat could get up the creek a ways."

As Matt figured it, the cabin where he had left McGlory and George was on the creek. Why couldn't he get the *Sprite* afloat and proceed by water to the cabin?

"I don't know anything about these lakes," went on Matt, "but I'd like to get some one who knows them and make a little cruise."

"Fourth Lake is mighty treacherous. Whenever there's a west wind she kicks up a big sea, and a lot of boats have come to grief on the rocks of Maple Bluff. That's here—that piece of land running out into the water, over where they've made a park. It used to be called McBride's Point. A mile across from the bluff is Governor's Island. The insane asylum is near the island. If you want to put your boat in Fourth Lake, why don't you launch it there instead of taking it to Third Lake?"

"Well, I want to try her out with a little longer cruise than just across Fourth Lake. Do you know of any one I could get to pilot me around?"

"H'm!" murmured the driver thoughtfully. Presently his face brightened. "Any objection to color?" he asked.

"How do you mean?"

"Well, how'd a colored boy do? I know of one that's right to home on the lakes, and he's a character, you bet. His name's Pickerel Pete; that's all he's got, just Pickerel Pete."

"He'll do," said Matt. "How can I get hold of Pickerel Pete?"

"Tell you what I'll do; I'll get hold of him for you. When you going to put that boat in the water?"

"Right away."

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"Course we got to deliver it for you. I'll have some of the boys help me get it on the dray, and on the way down to the lake I'll pick up Pete. You don't need to wait here. In half an hour you go down King Street to Wilson. There's a lot of landings and boathouses t'other side the railroad depot. If we ain't there when you reach the place, you wait, and we'll show up pretty soon afterward."

"That's mighty good of you," said Matt. "You'll be careful of the boat, will you?"

"Sure, you bet. No harm'll happen to her. We got a special dray for movin' boats like that."

Matt went to the capitol grounds and sat down on a bench. For half or three-quarters of an hour he was there, thinking of George and the unsatisfactory state his affairs had drifted into.

The king of the motor boys did not want to appear to be helping George to dodge his father's authority, but he knew that the elder Lorry would not have taken the stand he did if he had not acquired a whole lot of misinformation. The thing for Matt to do was to get back to George and McGlory, tell them exactly what had taken place, and then ask them for suggestions as to the next move.

On the way down King Street, Matt stopped at a store and bought a supply of gasoline, oil, and cotton waste. Not having a hydrometer, he tested the gasoline as well as he could by other means, and convinced himself that it was, as the dealer assured him, the "right stuff."

Matt rode down to the lake with the expressman who took his supplies, and when he got there he found the *Sprite* in the water, moored to a small pier. The express driver, and those who had helped him with the boat, were gone. The only person in the vicinity of the launch was a barefooted little darky. He sat on the pier, absorbed in throwing a couple of dice.

"Come seben, 'leben, come seben, 'leben," he was saying, as the small cubes rattled on the boards.

"Pickerel Pete!" called Matt.

The little negro jumped as though a bomb had exploded under him.

"Yassuh, yassuh, dat's me," he answered, grabbing up the dice and shoving them into a pocket of his ragged trousers.

"Come over here, Pete, and give us a hand with this gasoline and stuff."

"On de hop."

The gasoline was emptied into the tanks and the oil cups filled. After that Matt went over the machinery, carefully examining the ignition and all connections.

Pickerel Pete helped him intelligently.

"Yo's de fellah whut's a-wantin' tuh hiah me?" he inquired.

"Yes," replied Matt, highly pleased with the way Pete divined whatever he wanted and handed it over to him from the tool kit. "Do you know anything about a motor boat, Pete?"

"Ah's done steered heaps o' boats froo dese yer lakes, boss," grinned the moke, "an' Ah reckons Ah knows de spa'k plug f'om de propellah."

"You know the lakes, too?"

"Hones' tuh goodness, boss, Ah could go froo all de lakes f'om First tuh Fo'th, en cleah down de Rock Rivah, wif mah eyes shut. Ah'm er phenomegon."

"What's that?"

"Phenomegon. Doan' you-all know whut a phenomegon is?"

"You mean a phenomenon, I guess."

"Ah reckons Ah knows whut Ah means," answered Pete, with sudden dignity.

"You've mixed phenomenon and paragon, and——"

"Ah ain't mixed nuffin. Ef you-all thinks Ah'm er ignorampus, den Ah 'lows Ah ain't de fellah you wants tuh hiah."

"Yes, you are, Pete—you're just the fellow."

"How much does Ah git?"

"Two dollars a day. There's pay for your first day's work."

Pete almost fell out of the boat. Fifty cents a day was the most he had ever received.

"Does yo' think yo' kin stand dat, boss?" he inquired. "Ah'd hate mahse'f tuh def ef Ah thought Ah was er strainin' yo' financibility."

"I guess it won't be much of a wrench to give you a couple of dollars a day," laughed Matt.

"Den yo's bought me. By golly, dis is de first time Ah's evah had two whole dollahs knockin' togethah en mah clothes since Ah was knee-high to a chickum. Where you-all wants tuh go, boss?"

"I want to go into Fourth Lake through the canal, then across Fourth and up the Catfish."

"Dat's easy. De Catfish runs f'om one lake tuh de odder, intuh one en out ergin, cleah f'om Fo'th Lake tuh First. Thutty miles you-all kin go in er boat, den intuh Rock Rivah en clean erroun' de worl'. But dat 'ar Fo'th Lake is right juberous when dar's er west win'. A boat Ah was in once, on dat 'ar lake, turned ovah fo' times! Yassuh. I got spilled out de las' time en swum fo'teen miles towin' de boat by de painter, which Ah done happen tuh ketch when Ah drapped in de watah. Ah got er medal fo' dat. De Gun Club give me de medal."

"They ought to have given you two medals, Pete."

"En it was er solid gol' medal, with er inscripshun sayin' dat Pickerel Pete was gallywhoopus tuh dat extent. Golly, but dat was er fine medal! It was as big erroun' as er fryin' pan."

"Must have bothered you some to tote it."

"Sold it fo' fo' dollahs en fo'ty cents, en dey kep' it in de cap'tol fo' people tuh come in en look at. Yo's got er pow'ful fine moke wo'kin' fo' yo', boss."

"Well, cast off, Pete, and we'll start. I'll do the steering, and you can sit up front and tell me which way to go."

Matt started the gasoline, switched on the spark, and Pete gave the fly wheel a turn. One turn of the wheel was enough to give them their first explosion, and the *Sprite* shook herself together and started out into the lake.

CHAPTER VII.

GEORGE AND M'GLORY MISSING.

The hum of the motor was soothing to Matt's troubled spirit, and even the kick of the wheel sent a joyous thrill through his every nerve. There were clouds in the west, and a promise of wind and rain in the air, but if there was to be a storm it would not come before night, and the *Sprite* would have ample time to nose her way up the Catfish and into the creek. [Pg 11]

It was surprising how quickly the kinks of fortune straightened themselves out for Motor Matt whenever he found himself in control of an explosive engine.

The sun was sinking behind the capitol as the *Sprite* headed toward Winnequa on her way to the Canal. The yellow rays pierced the gathering clouds, and Madison peered from its enveloping greenery like a phantom city.

A number of fishermen were rowing, sailing, and motoring home for supper, and they stared at the dashing little *Sprite*, and some of them yelled a cheerful greeting to the diminutive colored boy perched on the launch's hood.

"Dat's de Gubernor ob Wisconsin," Pete gravely explained, indicating a grizzled fisherman in one of the boats. "Ah knows him as well as Ah knows anybody. De fellah in dat rowboat wif de pipe is Honnerbull Tawm Patterson, en he's done took me by de han' mo' times dan Ah kin count. De lake is full ob notoribus pussuns tuhnight, seems lak."

"Where's the Czar of Russia?" asked Matt soberly.

"Ah reckons he was too busy tuh come out tuhday," answered Pete. "Ah knows him, dough. Ah done took him tuh a good fishin' place ovah by Picnic P'int las' week."

They passed the canal and locks, swept into Fourth Lake, and Pete lined out a westerly course

that carried the *Sprite* past the high bluffs of McBride's Point with the buildings of the asylum in clear view.

Pete's chatter enlivened the trip wonderfully. The little moke was a "notoribus" personage, to take his word for it, and there were very few famous people whom he had not shaken hands with or conducted around the lakes. Matt was surprised to learn that he had dug bait for Julius Cæsar and had shown Napoleon Bonaparte a pickerel hole off Governor's Island.

The Catfish was comparatively easy for the *Sprite*, but Whisky Creek—which, Pete said, was the particular creek Matt was looking for—was too shoal. After they had grounded twice, and backed clear with considerable difficulty, Matt decided to tie up to a tree on the creek bank and go on to the cabin on foot.

By then it was falling dark, and Matt wanted to cover the remainder of his journey as quickly as possible.

"Pete," said he, getting out on the creek bank, "I'm going to leave you with the boat for a short time, while I go up the creek."

Pete immediately had an attack of the "shakes."

"Golly, boss," he chattered, "Ah doan' lak de da'k when Ah's erlone. Hit's spookerous, en white things done trabbel erroun' lookin' fo' brack folks. Where you-all gwine?"

"Not far. I ought to be back in an hour. You're not afraid of spooks, are you, Pete? I should think a chap who was the friend of so many illustrious people would be above such foolishness."

The gathering wind sobbed through the trees, and from somewhere a screech-owl tuned up in a most hair-raising way.

"Br-r-r!" muttered Pete, hugging himself and dropping into the bottom of the boat. "Ah ain't afraid, no, sah," he declared plaintively. "Ah ain't afraid ob anythin' dat walks. Hit's dem white ha'nts whut doan' walk, er fly, but moves erlong in er glide, dat gits me a-goin'. Mebby Ah better go along wif yo' en see dot yo' doan' git lost?"

"I'll not get lost, Pete, and I don't want the *Sprite* left alone."

"Yo'll be back in er houah, honess'?"

"Yes."

"Den hurry. Ef Ah was lef' in dishyer place twell midnight Ah'd be skeered plumb intuh de 'sylum, sho' as yo's bawn. Hurry up en git back, dat's all."

Pete cuddled up with his back against the stern thwart, and Matt whirled away and vanished into the timber.

As Matt figured it, he was not more than a mile from the cabin. He had landed on the side of the creek where he knew the shack to be, and if he followed the little water course he knew he would soon arrive at the place where he had left George and McGlory.

The timber was broken into by fields of corn, and by cleared pasture land. Matt pushed through the corn and climbed pasture fences, and within half an hour came to the end of his journey.

The cabin, nestling in a clump of oaks, seemed dark and deserted. George had known of the cabin as a rendezvous, in the fall, for duck hunters. It was a quiet and obscure place, and answered admirably the requirements of the boys while working out their plans in Lorry's behalf.

As Matt drew closer to the hut the silence oppressed him with a foreboding that something had gone wrong. The door was open, and he stepped inside.

Still there was no sign of life about the place.

"McGlory!" he called; "George!"

His voice echoed weirdly through the one room of the cabin, but brought no response.

Striking a match, he peered about him.

Empty! There was no one in the room.

The match flickered and dropped from Matt's fingers. Groping his way to a bench, he sat down, alarmed and bewildered.

What had become of McGlory and George? This was the question he asked himself, and his mind framed a dozen different answers, none of them satisfactory.

George was full of whims and unreasonable resolves. Had he suddenly made up his mind that he could not trust Matt to make peace with his father? Had he broken away from McGlory, and had McGlory gone in pursuit of him?

Or was the absence of the boys due to some move against them on the part of Big John?

Or had they gone to some farmhouse after milk and eggs, or to get a hot supper?

That George had not "bolted," Matt was almost sure. Matt's plan for patching up a truce with the elder Lorry had appealed to George too strongly for that.

As for Big John making George and McGlory any trouble, that was possible, although not very probable. Matt did not see how Big John could have any information about the cabin.

And as for the boys visiting a neighboring farmhouse to secure food, it was not in line with their

plan for either George or McGlory to show himself until their schemes were further advanced.

Rations had been secured in Waunakee—cold rations, but enough to last all three of the boys for two or three days.

Giving over his bootless reflections, Matt lighted another match, hunted up a candle, and soon had a more dependable glow in the room. [Pg 12]

A brief search showed him that George's suit case, McGlory's carpetbag, and his own satchel were missing. This was a staggering discovery. It meant, if it meant anything, that the two boys had left and did not intend to return.

They would hardly go away, it seemed to Matt, without leaving some clue as to their whereabouts, and the cause that had led them to make such a decided change in the general plans. George and McGlory understood that Matt was to return as soon as he had talked with Mr. Lorry.

Matt had expected to get back to the cabin early in the afternoon. Had his failure to return alarmed the two boys?

Matt hunted high and low for some scrap of writing which would let in a little light on the situation, but he could find none.

The rations brought from Waunakee had vanished along with the luggage—another fact that indicated a permanent departure on the part of the two lads.

"Here's a go!" muttered Matt, leaning perplexedly in the open door of the cabin. "About all George and McGlory left behind them was that piece of candle. They might, at least, have tipped me off regarding their intentions, I should think. All sorts of things are liable to happen to a fellow when he's trying to do the right thing by another chap who's too proud and weak-kneed to put himself company-front with his responsibilities. But then, George is an odd stick. He can't be judged by any of the usual standards, and I'm pretty sure that if he's handled right, he'll come out all right. One or the other of them will certainly come back here. I'll return to the mouth of the creek, get Pete, and we'll bunk down in the cabin. It's the only thing to be done."

Perplexed as he was, Matt neglected to put out the candle before starting on his return to the Catfish. On a corner shelf, the feeble gleam sputtered and flickered in the draft that came through the open door.

Matt hastened his steps on the return journey to the *Sprite*. The clouds were slowly mounting and blotting out the stars, intensifying the darkness.

As he came close to the bank where the launch was moored he experienced a feeling of relief when he saw the boat riding to her painter just as she had been left.

The *Sprite* resembled a black blot on the water. The bank was rather high, at that point, and its shadow covered the boat.

"Hello, Pete!" called Matt.

There was no answer to the call, and Matt began to think that Pete had vanished, as well as George and McGlory.

"Pete!" Matt cried in a louder tone.

"Yassuh, yassuh," came the answer from below, and Matt's apprehension suddenly subsided.

"Come up here, Pete," Matt went on. "We're going to spend the night up the creek. I guess the *Sprite* will be safe enough. There's a lantern in the port locker, amidships. Bring it up with you."

Matt could see only the blurred outline of a human form moving around in the boat. He heard the lid of the locker as it was lifted.

"Ah kain't find dat lantern," came from the boat.

"I'll get it," said Matt.

The next moment he had climbed into the launch. Hardly had his feet found firm foothold when he was seized and flung roughly backward. Two pairs of hands held him, and a hoarse, mocking laugh echoed in his ears.

CHAPTER VIII.

SETTING A SNARE.

Pickerel Pete did not feel overloaded with responsibility. Two dollars a day was a princely wage, but there were things he would not do even for that immense sum. He would try to stay with the boat for an hour, in spite of the owls and the queer crooning of the wind in the trees, but if he saw a "ha'nt," he'd resign his job, right then and there, and leave the *Sprite* to take care of herself. Anyhow, he had two dollars. The fact that his services had been paid for until afternoon of the following day did not enter seriously into his calculations.

"Wisht de screech-owls would stop dat 'ar screechin'," muttered the darky, "an' I wisht de win' would stop dat ar' groanin' in de trees. Dishyer's jest de time fer spookerous doin's, an' I'd radder be home in mah baid wif mah head kivered, so'st— Golly, whut's dat?"

Something fluttered among the tree branches overhanging the water, farther along the creek. It may have been an owl, or some other bird, changing its roosting place, but Pete's fears magnified the cause into something connected with the "ha'nts."

Crouching in the boat's bottom, he stared through the darkness and held his breath. The fluttering had ceased and nothing else happened. As one uneventful minute followed another, Pete gradually put the clamps on his nerves.

"Ah dunno 'bout dat," he whispered. "Mebby dat floppin' noise didun' mean nuffin', en den, ag'in, mebbly it *mout*. Hey, you, dar!" he added, lifting his voice.

The cry echoed across the creek, but the only answer was the echo.

"If yo's one ob dem gliderin' spooks," called Pete, "den you-all doan' want any truck wif *me*. Ah's on'y a po' li'l moke, en Ah ain't nevah done no ha'm tuh nobody. Ah's fibilus, occasion'ly, en now an' den Ah's tole a whopper, but dem yarns doan' amount tuh nuffin'."

The silence continued, save for the sougning of the wind and the "tu-whit, tu-who!" from the depths of the woods.

"Ah done got tuh do somethin' tuh pass de time," thought Pete. "Ah'll frow de iv'ries, dat's whut Ah'll do. Wonner where dar's a lantern?"

Pete remembered having seen a lantern in one of the lockers while he was helping Matt with the engine. After a little thought he located the lantern, and secured it. Then he recalled having seen a box of matches in the tool-chest, and he soon had the lantern going.

It's surprising what a soothing effect a light will have on a superstitious mind that dreads the dark. With the lantern on the stern thwart, Pete knelt in the boat's bottom and cast his dice again and again, becoming so careless of his "spookerous" surroundings that he almost forgot his fears.

The little white cubes dropped and rattled on the thwart, and Pete bent low to read the faces.

"Ah's got two dollahs," he muttered, surprised at the lucky combinations turning up for him, "en Ah wisht dar was some odder moke here tuh take er han' in dis game. Ah's havin' mo' luck, here, all by mahse'f, dan I evah——"

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He straightened on his knees in sudden panic, then dropped his head down on the thwart and covered his face with his hands.

"Whut's dat?" he whimpered. "Whut's dat Ah hear? Hit sounded monsus lak er chain rattlin'."

But it wasn't a chain; it was a good, well-developed groan. It came from the darkness at the top of the bank and echoed shiveringly across the creek.

"Dat wasn't no screech-owl," murmured Pete, in stifled tones. "Golly! De ha'nts is comin' fo' me. Wisht Ah was out ob here! Oh, I wisht Ah was some place else where dar's folks, en buildin's, en 'lectric lights. Br-r-r!"

The groan was repeated. It was a hollow kind of groan, long drawn out, and given in the most approved ghostly style. Pete groaned on his own account, and collapsed in the bottom of the boat, floundering forward and trying to crawl into the motor and lose himself in the machinery.

While the wretched little darky lay in a palpitating heap under the steering wheel, a funereal voice was wafted toward him—a voice that made him gasp, and close his eyes, and shiver until he shook the boat.

"Who-o are you-u-u?" inquired the voice.

"Oh, lawsy! Oh, mah goodness!" fluttered Pete in tremulous, incoherent tones. "Ah's as good as daid! Ah's nevah gwine tuh git out ob dis alive! Der ha'nts has cotched me! Oh, if I c'u'd only git away dis once, Ah'll nevah brag no mo'! Ah'll nevah tell anodder whopper!"

"Who-o are you-u-u?" insisted the sepulchral voice from the darkness at the top of the bank.

"Ah's er moke," whimpered Pete, "jes' a moke. You-all go 'long an' nevah min' me. Ah ain't nevah done nuffin'—Pickerel Pete's a good l'il coon. Please, Marse Gose, go off some odder place en do yo' gliderin'. Oh, gee! Oh, golly!"

"Go 'way, go 'way, go 'way!" ordered the "ghost."

"Ah'll go, yassuh," chattered Pete, "on'y doan' yo' grab me as Ah run by. Dat's all. Yo' ain't layin' fo' tuh grab me, is yuh?"

"Go 'way, go 'way, go 'way!" insisted the spook, with hair-raising emphasis.

Pete got up slowly and cautiously in the boat. The lantern threw a weird reflection over him, but the most noticeable thing about the frightened little darky, just then, was the white of his eyes. He shook like a person with the ague, and nearly dropped into the water while stepping from the gunwale of the boat.

Begging the spook not to grab him, he floundered up the bank and darted into the timber as though the Old Nick was after him. His piteous wail was lost in a crashing of bushes, and finally even that sound died out.

A chuckling laugh echoed from the top of the bank, and a form disentangled itself from the shadows.

"Come on, Kinky," called a voice. "That little nigger was scared white. He'll not stop running until he gets clear to Madison. What kind of a spook do I make, eh?"

"Pretty raw," answered another voice, as a second form pushed out of the shadows and joined the first. "You can fool a superstitious, half-grown darky, Ross, but I wouldn't make a business of this ghost racket. What was the good of it, anyhow?"

"Well, that darky never came here alone in that boat."

"Well."

"Some one must have come with him. Maybe the boat's other passengers are the two kids we couldn't find in the cabin."

"I don't know how it could be, Ross, but mebbe you're right. That's not a rowboat."

"Just what I was thinkin', Kinky. Let's go down and look her over. The darky was obliging enough to leave a lighted lantern for us."

The two men descended to the boat, and Ross picked up the lantern and swung it about him.

"It's a motor-boat, blamed if it ain't!" Kinky exclaimed.

"Right you are," chuckled Ross. "She must have come up from the town. What's she doin' here at this time o' night? Suspicious, that's what it is! I'll gamble heavy the boat has somethin' to do with the young fellers in that cabin."

"Well, like enough you're right," answered Kinky. "But what's that to us? We came up the Catfish in a boat, too, an' we'd better take to our oars an' go back to town huntin' for Big John. If he overhauled Motor Matt and got that money, we don't want to give him a chance to get away from us."

"We'll see to *that*," grunted Ross decisively.

"It looked as though Big John was tryin' to sidetrack us when he wanted us to keep watch of that cabin to-night. What's the good of watchin' the cabin if he gets the money? What's the use of keeping track of the other two boys when King's the one we want?"

"Right again, Kinky. That brain of yours seems to be doin' some brilliant work to-night. Here, take a hack at this."

Ross turned and held out a bottle.

"If I take too many hacks at that, Ross," answered Kinky, "the brilliant brain work is liable to stop."

Nevertheless he seized the bottle and a prolonged gurgling followed. When he had finished, Ross took the bottle back and gave some attention to it himself.

"All I want," growled Ross, as he screwed the top back on the flask, "is to get a chance at this here Motor Matt."

"Big John has already had a chance at him," suggested Kinky.

"Will Big John do anythin' to even up with Motor Matt for the way we was treated in 'Frisco Bay?" flung back Ross. "Don't you never think it, Kinky. If Big John gets the money, he'll turn the cub loose to make some more trouble for us. I'm built along different lines, myself. I want revenge, with a big R. That's me."

"Oh, slush!" grumbled Kinky. "You ought to have left more of that stuff in the bottle. *Your* brain work's anythin' but brilliant."

"I mean what I say, anyhow," rapped out Ross.

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Picking up the lantern, he went forward, crawled over the hood, and made a close examination of the forward part of the boat.

"Thunder!" he exclaimed.

"What've you found?" demanded Kinky.

"What was the name of that chug-boat the Chink won in 'Frisco, and that Motor Matt used in windin' us up?"

"*Sprite*."

"Well, wouldn't this knock you stiff? Say, Kinky, this here's the *Sprite*."

"Go on!"

"There's the name, plain enough."

"Then it's another *Sprite*. It's a common name, and the 'Frisco *Sprite* couldn't be here."

"It's the same boat, you take it from me. It looks the same, and by thunder it *is* the same."

"I don't see how it got here."

"Nor I—but here she is, for all that. Let's burn her!"

"What for?"

"If it hadn't been for this boat we'd have been on the way to the Sandwich Islands by now. I'll feel a heap better if we burn the blame thing."

"Aw, be sensible, can't you. If—"

"Hist!"

Ross interrupted Kinky with the warning syllable; then, quickly, the lantern was extinguished, and Ross crept back into the rear of the launch.

"Listen!" he whispered; "some one's coming."

"Then we'd better hike!"

"Not on your life! Crowd up forward, there. I played the spook, a while ago, and now let's see how well I can play the rôle of the darky."

"But what——"

"Sh-h-h!"

Thus suddenly did Ross lay his snare. As Kinky crept forward, Ross crouched in the stern; then followed the brief colloquy between Matt and Ross, the latter imitating the voice of the negro.

The instant Motor Matt dropped into the boat the snare suddenly tightened.

CHAPTER IX.

ENEMIES TO BE FEARED.

As Matt fell his head struck against the gunwale of the boat. His senses did not leave him entirely, but he was stunned for a few moments and rendered incapable of doing anything in his own defense. Before he recovered sufficiently to struggle with his assailants the two men had found a rope and had lashed his hands.

"Now for his feet, Kinky," said Ross. "This is a haul I wasn't expectin', although we might have figured it out, I guess, if we'd had time to think things over."

Matt kicked out with his feet in a desperate attempt to overturn Kinky, and, perhaps, leap upright and jump ashore.

"He's a fighter, all right," snarled Ross. "Here, I'll hold him while you finish the job."

With hands bound and two men to secure his ankles, resistance was worse than useless. When the binding was done, and Matt was lying helpless, he had a chance to study the faces of his captors while Kinky was relighting the lantern.

Ross' talk had already given Matt an inkling of the two men's identity. The gleam from the lantern left no doubt about their being Big John's pals.

Matt was not surprised that the two rascals should be in that part of the country. They and Big John were birds of a feather, and it was quite natural that all three should flock together. What did surprise Matt, however, was the fact that Kinky and Ross should be in that particular place, and have laid their plans to capture him.

"Surprise party, eh?" queried Ross. "You weren't expectin' to meet a couple of old friends, eh, Motor Matt? Oh, you're not so much. You're cracked up pretty high, but I reckon you're not any brighter than the rest of us. Wonder if you've got ten thousand about you that we could borrow for a while?"

"You're after that money," said Matt, "and you're fooled. You won't get it, and neither will Big John. It has been in Mr. Lorry's hands ever since noon. You didn't think I'd bring ten thousand dollars back with me in cash, did you? The money was in the form of a draft, payable to Mr. Lorry, and it wouldn't have benefited you or Big John any if you had stolen it."

"That's luck for old Lorry, then," answered Ross, pushing his hand into Matt's pockets. "Here's a roll," he added, drawing some bills out of Matt's vest. "It's hardly big enough for the ten thousand, but I reckon we'll have to be satisfied with what we can get."

"If you take that," said Matt, "you'll be in trouble with the law before you're many hours older. So far as San Francisco is concerned, I'm willing to let bygones be bygones; but if you take my money I'll do everything I can to have you caught."

Kinky seemed nervous. Ross, however, was reckless and in an evil temper.

"We'll *not* get ourselves into trouble," he flared. "By the time we're through with you, my hearty, there won't be anybody to make us trouble."

Ross brought out his flask again and helped himself liberally to its contents.

"Here," he said, extending the flask toward Kinky.

"I guess I've had enough," demurred Kinky.

"Take it, you fool!" cried Ross; "you'll need it before we're done with this night's work."

Not until that moment did Motor Matt realize that here were two enemies who were seriously to be feared. He had thought, when he recognized his captors, that they had merely made a prisoner of him in the hope of securing the ten thousand dollars, but now he realized that there was something more villainous, perhaps more murderous, back of their scheming.

Liquor arouses the evil passions of men and makes them ripe for deeds they would not think of committing when in their sober senses. Kinky and Ross were partly intoxicated. Kinky was the

less desperate of the two villains, mainly because he was the more cowardly.

Matt hardened himself to face whatever might be coming.

"You'd better think well about this, Ross," said he. "All you've got to do to keep clear of the law is to return my money, set me at liberty, and take yourselves off. I'll forget what you've done, and what happened in San Francisco Bay——"

"That's more than we'll do, you young cub," scowled Ross. "You hadn't any notion I followed you all the way from 'Frisco, on the same train, had you? You didn't know I got off the train at Waunakee, when you got off, and that I trailed you and your two friends to that cabin in the woods, eh? And I don't believe, when you and your pards were talking in that cabin, that you had any notion I was hanging around and listening. But I was. I knew one of you was to go into town this morning with the money for old Lorry, so it was me that put Big John wise and had him waiting for you on the road. But do you think I rigged myself out in different clothes and followed you clear from 'Frisco just in the hope of getting that money? You're wrong if you do think that. I was after something else—and that was to *play even*. It's a habit of mine always to settle my accounts. Big John works differently—but I'm not responsible for what he does, or doesn't do. When I lay out a course and take the bit in my teeth, nothing can stop me."

There was a short silence.

"But, I say, Ross," began Kinky in faint protest, "you don't intend to——"

"Wait till I ask you to talk," cut in Ross. "You can bobble more in your conversation than any man I ever knew."

"Do you know where my two friends are?" queried Matt. "You know who I mean—young Lorry and McGlory."

"We don't know where they are. I don't object to telling you if that will make you any easier in your mind."

"Where's the colored boy that was here with the boat?"

"I played spook and scared him out. He's on the way to Madison, and is hitting only the high places. Is this the old *Sprite* you used in 'Frisco Bay?"

"Yes."

"Glad to know it. She'll go up in smoke before we're done with her."

Ross' veiled hints of what he was going to do did not bother Matt very much. He had a hearty contempt for a boaster—even a desperate boaster of Ross' stamp.

The scoundrel was in a communicative mood, and many points which had been dark to Matt were being cleared away.

"What has Big John done," Matt asked, "to get Mr. Lorry down on me?"

Ross laughed huskily.

"How do I know?" he answered. "Big John is about as sly as they make 'em. I didn't know he'd done anything to get Lorry down on you—didn't think he'd have the nerve to go near Lorry. You got away from that pal of ours?"

"Yes."

"Then I wish John was here with us. He's probably as mad as a hornet over losing that money, and would make a better stand-by than Kinky."

"I never go back on a pal," expanded Kinky, "but I think a pal ought to be sensible and not kick up too big a row for his own good."

"You'll find the row plenty big enough if you go too far," warned Matt, speaking for Kinky's especial benefit.

Kinky stirred uneasily.

"It's a case," declared Ross, "where we've got to go as far as we can. That's what'll make it safe for us. Kinky and me have been loafing in the woods all day. We were not to report to Big John until to-night. It's safer for us, you understand, to get together at night than at any other time."

Matt had been working desperately at the cord that bound his hands. The cord was drawn tight and firmly knotted, and his efforts had not met with much success.

Ross suddenly detected him in his work, and, with an oath, jerked him over and looked at the rope.

"That's enough of that," he said sternly. "Suppose you do get rid of the rope, how'll it help you? You lay still and be quiet, that's your cue."

"What are we going to do, Ross?" inquired Kinky nervously.

"You're going up on the bank and cast off the painter," returned Ross. "I don't think you're any too steady on your feet, so be careful."

"What do you want me to cast off the painter for? We've got a boat of our own, and we don't need this."

"I'm engineerin' this deal, Kinky," said Ross sharply. "Do as I say, or else take to the woods and let me do it alone."

Kinky got up and staggered ashore. Although he worked awkwardly, yet he finally succeeded in releasing the painter and throwing the rope aboard. Then he scrambled back into the boat himself.

Ross, meanwhile, had been starting the engine. He proceeded in a way that proved he had some knowledge of motors.

Turning the *Sprite*, Ross sent her slowly toward the mouth of the creek, peering sharply ahead as they moved through the water. [Pg 16]

"There she is," muttered Ross, shutting off the power.

As the *Sprite* came to a halt, Ross reached over the side and caught the gunwale of another boat.

"We'll tow our boat behind, Kinky," announced Ross. "Climb into her and make sure the oars are safe inboard, then fasten her painter to the stern of the *Sprite*."

This rather difficult operation was safely accomplished, and then, with the rowboat in tow, the launch glided out of the creek into the Catfish, and down the Catfish toward Fourth Lake.

How was that voyage to end for Motor Matt?

CHAPTER X.

BETWEEN FIRE AND WATER.

Matt's position in the boat enabled him to watch one dark bank of the river as they glided down toward the lake. He was listening and looking for some sign of life on the bank. Had he seen any one, a shout would quickly have apprised the person of the prisoner's predicament.

But Matt saw no one. Steadily the *Sprite* glided onward—steadily, but covering so crooked a course that Matt wondered they did not drive into the bank on one side or the other.

The lake was reached. The storm promised by the late afternoon was slow in coming. The wind was no higher than it had been, two or three hours before, but the waves were beating sullenly on the rocks as if in warning of what was to come.

Far across the lake Matt could see the glare of city lights. Because of his position in the boat, the other shore of the lake was not visible to him.

He was looking for other boats, but there were very few boats on the lake at the time. He saw one moving light, however, and essayed a lusty call for help.

Ross swore savagely.

"Clap a hand over that cub's mouth!" he snapped.

At the same instant he jerked one hand from the wheel, caught up the lantern, and dropped it overboard.

Kinky, meanwhile, had forced his hands over Matt's lips.

The light Matt had seen had shifted its position, and was gliding toward the *Sprite*.

"Hello, there!" called a voice from the dark.

"Hello, yourself," flung back Ross.

"Did you hail us?"

"No."

"I thought some one yelled. What became of your light?"

"A lubber here with me knocked it overboard."

"Well, you'd better get out another. If you take my advice, you won't stay out long, either. There's nasty weather coming, and we're making for our berth over at the asylum."

Ross allowed this warning to go unanswered. The light of the other boat dwindled away and vanished in the gloom.

"This is far enough, I reckon," Ross remarked, halting the *Sprite*. "You can leave him alone now, Kinky," he added. "He could yell till he's black in the face and no one would hear him; but, if he knows what's good for him, he won't whoop it up while we're close to him. Pull the rowboat up alongside, Kinky."

Ross lifted the hood and leaned down into the space reserved for the motor and the gasoline tanks.

"Confound it!" he exclaimed, lifting himself erect, "I wish I had that lantern now."

He continued to grumble and work around in the bow of the boat. At last he finished his labor, whatever it was, and turned to Kinky.

The latter was holding the rowboat alongside the launch. The task was none too easy, as the swell was bumping the boats together and then forcing them apart.

"What am I to do, Ross?" asked Kinky. "I can't hang on here much longer."

"Get into the rowboat and take the oars," ordered Ross.

"Ain't you going along with me?"

"Sure, when I get through."

"What's your game?"

"Never you mind," was the angry retort. "It's my game, from now on, and you'll watch and do as you're told. Get into the boat and hold her close to the *Sprite* with the oars. When I want you I'll let you know. Mind your eye when you change or you'll find yourself at the bottom of the lake."

Kinky made three attempts to get from one boat into the other. At the last attempt he came near swamping the rowboat, and when he drew back and clung panting to the side of the *Sprite* the rowboat had got away from him.

Ross shouted his maledictions.

"What can you expect of a fellow workin' like this in the dark?" grunted Kinky. "I ain't no sailor, anyway."

"You got feet and hands, haven't you? Then why don't you use 'em?"

With this retort, Ross started the motor and laid the *Sprite* alongside the rowboat once more.

"Now," he ordered, "try it again, Kinky. If you get a spill you'll stay in the lake for all of me."

Kinky's next effort was more successful. He had a narrow escape, but he finally plumped down into the bottom of the rowboat, righted himself unsteadily, and got on the 'midships thwart. A moment more and he had shipped the oars.

"Now what?" he demanded.

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His own temper was beginning to rise at the rough, and perhaps unnecessary, work he had been made to do.

Ross had again switched off the power of the motor and the launch was rolling in the waves.

"Wait, and I'll tell you," answered Ross.

He was lashing the steering wheel with a piece of rope. Kinky could not see what he was doing, or he would probably have ventured some remarks. Matt, however, was able to follow the scoundrel's movements, and a vague alarm ran through him.

"What are you up to, Ross?" asked Matt sternly.

Ross snarled at him, but did not make any response that could be understood.

"I suppose you could get at this wheel, bound as you are," muttered Ross, turning around, at last, and facing Matt. "But I'll fix that," he added with a brutal laugh.

Making his way to where Matt was lying, he caught him by the shoulders and dragged him roughly forward.

"What are you doing this for?" demanded Matt.

Ross was strong, and, without deigning a reply, he heaved the helpless youth up onto the hood. Bound as he was, Matt's position was precarious in the extreme.

"I never thought you were such a scoundrel, Ross," Matt said quietly. "It can't be you're going to leave me like this."

"You wait till I get through," was the fierce answer.

By craning his head around, Matt could see Ross pick up a pile of waste. From the pungent odor of gasoline which assailed Matt's nostrils he knew that the waste had been soaked in the inflammable stuff.

Ross carried the waste back into the stern of the boat.

"You like motors, King," called Ross, "and I'm going to give you such a ride on a motor-boat as you never had before. I hope you'll enjoy it."

"For the last time, Ross," called Matt, horribly conscious of the trend the scoundrel's work was taking, "I ask you to think of what you are doing."

"I've thought of it all I'm going to. It's a fine plan, and I'm going to carry it right through to a finish."

Ross turned to the rowboat, which Kinky was keeping close to the *Sprite*.

"Come alongside, Kinky," Ross called. "I'm about ready to be taken off."

"What have you been doin', Ross?" demanded Kinky, pulling the other boat closer.

Matt felt, at that moment, as though Kinky was his only hope.

"He's got me tied here on the hood, Kinky," Matt called, "and he's going to fire the boat! If you let him keep on, you'll be equally guilty with him, and the law will sooner or later take care of you both."

"Let him talk!" exclaimed Ross. "Much good it'll do him. A little more to the left, Kinky."

The man in the rowboat had turned to look.

"Is that him on that forward deck, Ross?" asked Kinky.

"That's where I put him."

"Blazes! Why, he's liable to roll off into the water and be drowned. What did you put him there for?"

"I told you I was attendin' to this," retorted Ross. "Get that boat alongside here, and be quick about it."

"But I'm not goin' to stand for any——"

"You're going to do as I tell you. Get alongside."

Kinky, unfortunately for Matt, had the weaker will of the two. He was plainly afraid of Ross, and the latter could bullyrag him into doing anything.

As the rowboat came up, Ross leaned over and grabbed the painter. Securing the end of it to the driver's seat of the launch, he stepped back into the stern, struck a match, and dropped it into the heap of waste.

A fire leaped upward instantly, and a yell of consternation broke from Kinky.

"Ross, you're mad! You want to make a swinging job of this for both of us, I guess. Put out that blaze or I'll put it out myself."

Ross did not reply. Hastening forward again, he started the motor, and the *Sprite* began driving ahead, hauling the rowboat with it.

"This course, Motor Matt," said Ross, "will carry you direct to Maple Bluff. I hope you'll have a comfortable landing. Good-by, and good luck to you! Have I paid my debts? Think it over."

Whirling swiftly, Ross clambered into the rowboat.

"I'll not stand for this!" yelled Kinky. "This may be your idea of paying your debts, but——"

Ross pushed Kinky backward, sending him sprawling across the 'midships thwart.

"Get up and take the oars," he cried. "Pal of mine though you are, if you try to make me any more trouble something will happen to you. I've got the bit in my teeth, I tell you, and I'll settle for Motor Matt as I think best."

Ross leaned forward and slashed the blade of his pocketknife through the painter, and a hoarse laugh echoed in Motor Matt's ears as the burning launch leaped away through the thick shadows.

CHAPTER XI.

CHUMS TO THE RESCUE.

Matt was several moments realizing the terrible predicament in which Ross had placed him. The glowing fire in the stern of the *Sprite* lighted the darkness with a ghastly glare.

The boat was on fire and speeding, with a lashed wheel, across the troubled waters of the lake.

What could Matt do to save himself? It was a time when he must think quickly. He would also have to act with promptness and decision—an impossibility in his helpless state.

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If he could roll back over the hood, he might contrive to get aft and, in some manner, smother the fire.

He made the attempt—and succeeded, although not until he had come within an inch of sliding off the rounded hood and into the lake.

As he fell into the bottom of the boat, he struck the lever that controlled the sparking apparatus, throwing off the switch and causing the *Sprite* to slow to a halt.

This was a little gained, for the speed of the boat would not now fan the flames; but Matt was wedged in between the driver's seat and the motor, and found it impossible to extricate himself.

His heart sank.

Was this to be the end? Was the *Sprite* to burn and sink, there in the open lake, and carry him to the bottom?

At this moment, just as his hopes were at the lowest ebb, he heard a shout from near at hand.

"Matt! Where are you, pard?"

McGlory! That was McGlory's voice!

The wonder of McGlory's being there to help him was lost, for the moment, in the wild joy that swelled in Matt's breast.

"Here!" he shouted.

A whoop of delight came from McGlory.

"We've found him, George!" Matt heard him exclaim.

Then there came a splash of oars and a jolt as another boat bumped against the *Sprite*.

"Hold her steady, pard," McGlory went on, "and I'll get Matt out of this in a brace of shakes."

The next moment the cowboy scrambled into the launch.

"Where are you, Matt?" called McGlory.

"Never mind me," Matt answered; "put out the fire. Beat it out—use your coat."

The fire looked worse than it was in reality. Not much of the woodwork was afire, but the blazing waste had been scattered by the wind and was sending up smoke and flame from the stern almost to the driver's seat.

McGlory was thinking more about Matt than he was about the boat. However, he had his orders and did not stop to do any arguing. Jerking off his coat, he got to work at once.

Lorry helped. Fastening the skiff which had brought him and McGlory off from the shore, he likewise removed his coat, and the little *Sprite* rocked and pitched with the mad efforts of the two boys to get the best of the blaze.

Inside of five minutes they had the last flame smothered. While George dipped up water with his cap and deluged the smoking woodwork, McGlory pulled Matt out of his cramped quarters.

"Well, speak to me about this!" gasped McGlory. "He's tied! Say, this would make the hair stand on a buffalo robe. Lashed hand and foot and turned adrift out in the middle of the lake! Sufferin' volcanoes! Who did it, pard?"

"Get the ropes off me," said Matt, "and then I can talk to better advantage. My arms are numb clear to the shoulder."

McGlory pulled a knife from his pocket and groped carefully while he cut the cords.

"It seems like a dream," muttered Matt.

"Nightmare, you mean," returned McGlory. "If I'd been in such a fix I'd 'a' thrown a fit."

"And then to have you fellows come!" went on Matt. "I don't know how you managed it, but here you are, and here I am, and I guess the old *Sprite* is good for several trips yet. Shake!"

McGlory caught Matt's outstretched hand and gave it a hearty pressure. As soon as the cowboy was through, Matt leaned over and gave Lorry's hand a cordial grip.

"I'll never forget what you have done for me," declared Matt.

"Shucks!" muttered McGlory. "That's what pards are for—to help one another when they're in a tight pinch. And I'm an Injun if this *wasn't* a tight one. But see here, once, Matt. You called this boat the *Sprite*."

"That's her name, Joe."

"Queer they'd have another motor boat, same size and rig of that 'Frisco launch and with the same name, here at Madison."

"It's the same *Sprite*."

"Not the same boat you fellows used in Frisco Bay!" exclaimed Lorry.

"The same identical boat," returned Matt.

"Wouldn't that rattle your spurs?" breathed McGlory. "But how did she get here?"

"By express."

"Who sent her?"

"Ping."

"Ping! And did the yaller mug come with her?"

"If he did I haven't seen him."

"Why," went on Lorry, "the boat came through nearly as quick as we did!"

"How did Ping know where to send her?" asked McGlory.

"He could have found that out easy enough. They knew at police headquarters that we were coming to Madison."

"And she came by express!"

"Yes, with charges of over two hundred and fifty dollars for transportation."

"Tell me about that!" McGlory nearly fell off his seat. "But that's just like a heathen Chineese. Probably he thought the charges wouldn't be more'n a dollar and a half. And they were over two-fifty! Sufferin' millionaires!"

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"It's all well enough to talk," put in Lorry, "but there are lots more comfortable places than a motor boat, with a dead engine, in the middle of the lake."

"That's right, too," agreed McGlory. "Every once in a while little George, the child wonder, gets a bean on the right number. It will be blowing great guns on this stretch of water before morning. I move we hike."

"Where'll we hike?"

"Did you fix things up in Madison?" George inquired.

"Not the way I wanted to, George," said Matt. "We'll have to talk about that."

"Then we won't go to Madison," declared George, "and that's settled. We might as well haul off into the Catfish and spend the night in the boat."

"There used to be a 'tarp' for coverin' her in rough weather," put in McGlory. "Was Ping thoughtful enough to send all the stuff that belonged to her?"

"He was," said Matt, "at thirty-seven dollars and fifty cents a hundred pounds—three times the merchandise rate."

"Oh, glory! What did you take the boat off the express company's hands for, pard?"

"For the reason, Joe, that I had use for her."

"And this is the kind of use you've been putting her to!" muttered the cowboy. "It wasn't worth the price, not by a whole row of 'dobies."

The waves were rolling higher and higher, and the *Sprite* was pitching like an unruly broncho.

"We'll have to get out of this," said Lorry, as the skiff alongside smashed against the *Sprite's* bulwarks and gave them all a rough shaking. "The wind's carrying us toward Maple Bluff, and I don't want any experience with the bluff on a night like this. Where's a lantern? Is there one aboard?"

"There was," answered Matt, "but Ross threw it into the lake."

"Ross!" gulped McGlory. "You don't mean to say you've seen him?"

"We'll go over all that later," said Matt. "We'll make for the Catfish as fast as we can."

"That's as good a place as any, I reckon, seeing as how George isn't ready to go to Madison."

Matt opened the hood and sniffed at the engine to ascertain if there was any waste gasoline dripping from the tanks. He decided that the tanks were all closed.

The engine was started and Matt brought the boat's nose around into the wind. The trailing skiff was allowed to fall behind to the end of its mooring chain.

There was thunder, off in the west, and an occasional sharp flash of lightning. The flashes served to guide Matt over the course he had recently covered, while a prisoner in the hands of Ross and Kinky.

As he held the *Sprite* steadily to her course, more and more the wonder grew upon him as to the timely arrival of McGlory and George. Although Matt, when bound and cast adrift, had left a fiery trail over the lake, yet he was positive that the grewsome beacon alone had not been responsible for the providential appearance of his two friends.

But everything would soon be made clear, and Matt hurried the moment of explanation by driving the launch at her best speed.

The wind, of course, delayed the boat appreciably, but her sharp bows cut the water like a knife, and the white spray went swirling upward on both sides of the craft, high into the night.

It was an exhilarating ride, and thoroughly enjoyed by Matt and George. McGlory loved boats, but he had been built for a landsman, and the roll and tumble of rough water gave him unpleasant feelings in the region of the stomach.

The cowboy drew a long breath of relief when the launch battled her way into the quieter waters of the Catfish, and he sprang eagerly ashore to make the boat fast to a tree, under the lee of a steep bank.

"There's a boathouse near here," said George, when the skiff had also been secured, "and the proper move for us is to make for it and break in. The rain will be coming down in sheets before long. The boathouse belongs to a friend of mine, and he won't make much of a fuss when he knows who it was broke into the place."

Before Matt left the launch he spread the tarpaulin over it carefully and made the edges secure to the metal pins along the gunwale; then, led by Lorry, the boys made their way to the boathouse.

Forcing an entrance was not difficult, and just as the lads got inside the rain began.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW FATE THREW THE DICE.

There was a rough but comfortable sitting room in one end of the boathouse. Lorry, who was familiar with the place, left Matt and McGlory near the door which they had forced open, and groped his way to the sitting room, where he lighted a tin lamp.

There was a smell of stale cigarette smoke in the room, and the walls were papered with pictures of prize fighters, sailboats, race horses, and "footlight favorites," all cut from newspapers and magazines. This, and the acrid odor of cigarettes, attested sufficiently the taste of the owner of the boathouse.

There were chairs enough to seat the three boys comfortably.

"Somebody has been here, pard," declared McGlory, "and not so very long ago, either."

"He's a Sherlock Holmes, all right," grinned Lorry. "How do you suppose he knew that, Motor Matt?" [Pg 20]

"Oh, go on!" growled the cowboy. "Your friend George is a cigarette fiend. Why do you reckon the windows were draped like that?"

There were two small windows in the sitting room, and each was covered with a double thickness of canvas, battened down on all sides.

"Give it up," said Lorry. "Ollie must have been having a game of cards here with some of the boys, and probably he didn't want anybody looking in."

"Ollie?" murmured Matt, startled, suddenly remembering that, at the time of the attempted robbery on the Waunakee road, Big John had addressed his youthful companion as "Ollie."

"Yes, Ollie Merton," answered Lorry; "he's the fellow who owns this place."

"What sort of looking fellow is he?"

"Why, he's about my build, rather dark, and with a face that's not much of a recommendation; but Ollie's been a good friend of mine, just the same."

Matt was convinced that the Ollie he had met on the Waunakee road, under such evil conditions, was the same Ollie who had papered that rude little sitting room—and had left behind him the reek of his cigarettes.

"What are you asking about Ollie for?" inquired Lorry curiously.

"We'll get to that in a few minutes," said Matt. "Just now I want to hear how you fellows came to leave the cabin on the creek, and what sort of a coincidence it was that enabled you to come to my rescue, out there on the lake."

"I reckon we can explain that a heap easier than you can explain how you came to be lashed hand and foot and jammed between the thwart and the engine of a burning boat," returned McGlory. "You didn't get back to the cabin, that was one of the things that bothered George and me, and we couldn't savvy the why of it; then, all at once, we spotted our old friends, Ross and Kinky, standing among the oaks and piping off the cabin. *Was* it a jolt? Say, speak to me about that. 'That means trouble,' said George, and I allowed that he had rung the bell.

"There we'd been congratulatin' ourselves that no one knew of the hang-out, when along comes those 'Frisco gents, loafing in the scrub and taking the sizing of our wickiup. Having made up our minds that the appearance of Ross and Kinky spelled trouble with a big T, George and me got to guessing that those two lads had somehow interfered with your getting back to the cabin, Matt.

"'We'll duck out of this, George,' says I, 'and you can bet your moccasins on *that*. And when we duck,' I says further, 'we'll take the luggage and the grub along with us.'

"'But what about Matt?' says George. 'He's trying to do something for me, in Madison, and it looks kind of rough to scatter when maybe he'll whistle for this siding even if he is somewhat behind his running time. Didn't you tell me that Motor Matt usually does what he says he'll do?'

"You must admit, Matt, that this cousin of mine is improving a whole lot or he'd never have thought of that. Up to now, he's been so busy taking care of Number One that he hasn't had any consideration for the rest of the human race. But I explains to him like this:

"'Georgie, we're makin' a change of base. That's all. When we dodge those tin horns, and pile our traps in another part of the woods, we'll sneak back here on the q. t. and watch for Matt. Like as not we can head him off on the Waunakee road before he reaches the bridge over the creek.'

"George thought that would be all right, so we get our plunder together, sneak out of the cabin, drop over the edge of the creek bank, crawl a mile downstream, and sashay right into the woods. I don't know whether you'll believe it or not—things like that happen mostly in story books—but we find the neatest cave you ever crawled into right on the banks of the Catfish. George says it's a second edition of Black Hawk's cave. Well, say, after we get the bats out of that hole in the rock, we are almost as snug as we are here, this minute. Sufferin' Niagara, hear it pour!"

"Never mind the rain, Joe," said Matt. "Your talk is mighty exciting. Go on with it."

"Of course," proceeded McGlory, "we couldn't enjoy our cave while you were due to arrive at the cabin any minute and drop into the hands of Ross and Kinky. I reckon it was about eight o'clock into dewfall when George and me crawled out of that hole and started to make a short cut for the Waunakee road. Then, right in the middle of the dark, we heard somethin' coming our way just a-tearin'. George guessed bears and I guessed Injuns; but, no, we were both fooled. It was a little negro—George struck a match and got his color a minute after him and me had collided and I had flopped him on his back and was holding him down. Then——"

"Pickerel Pete!" exclaimed Matt.

"That's a guess for your life. Sure, pard, it was Pickerel Pete, and a scared Pickerel he was, at that. He thought George and me was a pair of 'ha'nts,' whatever they are; but George knew him, and he braced up some when he made sure that we were perfectly human.

"Then—speak to me about what that little ebony chap told us! Motor Matt had hired him for two plunks a day—you're getting reckless with your money, pard—and he had piloted Motor Matt from Third Lake to Fourth, and from Fourth up the Catfish to Whisky Creek. Motor Matt had left the boat tied up there, with Blackberry on guard, and gone on afoot up the creek. Then spooks [Pg 21]

arrived, ordered Pete to duck, and he had started for home like a singed cat. He was on his way when he ran into us.

"Well, George and me was all crinkled up with a scare. Matt's gone on to the cabin, we figure it out, and he's dropped into the hands of Ross and Kinky. We make a run for the cabin. No one there, not even Ross and Kinky. But there's a candle still burnin' on the corner shelf.

"Was it Motor Matt who lit that candle, we asked ourselves, or Big John's pals? Of course we couldn't tell that, but we allowed it was probably Matt who had struck a light. Then it was us for the mouth of the creek to see what was going on at the launch.

"I forgot to tell you, pard, that George and I had found a skiff, while we were fooling around the creek bank, waiting for you to get back. The skiff pleased me—I never saw a boat yet that didn't—and I suggested to George that we paddle down the creek in the skiff. That would save climbing fences and blundering around in the dark. Well, we took the skiff. It didn't draw much more'n a drink of water, and, although the creek is lower than usual at this time of year, according to George, we got down it all right. Just as we got within hailing distance of the launch, we heard the chug of an engine, and some one calling from the boat to some one else on the bank. We'd found Ross and Kinky—their voices give 'em away; and from what they said later we also knew that we'd found *you*.

"George and I were up a tree for fair, then. Ross and Kinky were 'heeled'—we didn't have to guess any about that—while all I had was a pocketknife, and all George had was a scarfpin.

"'Well,' says George, 'I'm not going to leave those tin horns to do what they please with Matt.' Surprisin', eh, the way this cousin of mine is beginnin' to act? He was as nervy as a Ute buck with an overload of tizwin. I asks George what he thinks we can do against two men with a pair of hardware hornets that sting six times apiece. George didn't know, but allowed we'd better drop down the creek and get a closer view.

"By the time we got down to where the launch was she had moved on and stopped again. When she moved on once more, something was trailing behind her. It was so dark we couldn't see what the thing was very plain, but after some sort of a while we made out that it was a boat. Well, how we ever did it I don't know, but George—it was George, mind you—made our chain painter fast to the stern of the trailing rowboat—and that's the sort of procession we made down the Catfish." McGlory threw back his head and laughed till he shook. "First, the launch," he went on; "then the rowboat, then George, and me, and the skiff. Sufferin' side-wheelers! Why, I nearly gave the snap away enjoying it."

"Great spark plugs!" muttered Matt. "When we went down the Catfish, I was watching the bank, hoping to see some one I could call to. And there were you and George behind us all the time! I wish Ross and Kinky knew about that."

"It was too much fun to last, pard," continued McGlory, sobering a little. "When we got out into the lake the heavier swell made the chain break loose from the rowboat, and we had to follow with the oars, which was slow work. We were a long ways off when you spoke that other launch; and when you started like a streak of fire for the northwest end of the lake, we were still so far off that we didn't think we could reach you in time to do you any good. But we broke our backs at the oars, and managed to make it. You know the rest."

"Fine!" exclaimed Matt admiringly. "Say, you fellows are pards worth having. What became of Pickerel Pete?"

"Bother him!" put in George. "We didn't have any time to fool with the little moke after we heard what he had to tell us about you."

"He kept on toward town, burnin' the air," said McGlory.

"I think," said Matt reflectively, "that this cave of yours would be a safer place for us than this boathouse."

"Safer," returned the cowboy, "but it hasn't got any chairs and nothing to make a light with. Hear the rain, once! Gee, *compadres*, I wouldn't move from here to the cave, through all that water, for a bushel of double eagles."

"Why is the cave safer?" asked Lorry.

"Because this Ollie Merton isn't such a friend of yours as you think," said Matt.

George Lorry stiffened in the old, arrogant way.

"I guess I know my friends," he answered frigidly.

"Listen," went on Matt. "When I left the cabin and started along the Waunakee road, some one in the bushes threw a riata at me. It was Big John threw the rope, and along with Big John was this Ollie Merton. They were after that ten thousand dollars, but I played a trick on them and got away with the draft. It was your sister, George, that helped me get away."

"What!" exclaimed George; "not Ethel?"

"Yes. She was on the Waunakee road with her motor car——"

George scowled.

"The governor would put twenty-five hundred in a runabout for sis," he growled, "and wouldn't scrip up when I wanted a motor boat. Is that right? Is——"

Voices were heard outside, accompanying a slushy crunch of wet gravel. Matt leaped for the light

and blew it out.

"Not a word!" he whispered. "That must be Ollie Merton, and we don't want him to see us. There's an overturned catboat—get under it." [Pg 22]

Lorry tried to protest, but Matt caught him by the arm and hustled him toward the overturned boat. The boat had been lying under the boys' eyes during their talk. Barely had they secreted themselves when the door opened and two persons walked in, followed by a whirling gust of rain.

"Whoosh!" called a familiar voice, "I'm glad to get out of that, Ollie."

"Big John!" whispered Matt in Lorry's ear. "He's come here with Merton. Keep quiet, now, and listen."

CHAPTER XIII.

UNDER THE OVERTURNED BOAT.

When Matt, Lorry, and McGlory had made forcible entrance into the boathouse, it had been through the door that fronted the river. Merton and Big John had entered through a door at the other end of the house. Thus, for a time, at least, the broken lock on the other door was not discovered.

"Light up," went on the voice of Big John. "And if you've got anything in a bottle, Ollie, trot it out and mebbly it'll drive the chill from our bones. I'm not pinin' for an attack of rheumatism."

"I've got that, too," answered Ollie, with a fatuous snicker. "Always keep something for snake bites."

"And it's a bad thing for a lad of your years. Hurry up with the light."

"Give me time to get out of this mackintosh and then I'll hunt for matches."

There followed the slap of a wet garment on the floor. The next moment a match was struck, and young Merton could be seen making for the lamp. The moment he touched the chimney he jumped back with a cry and the match dropped from his fingers.

"What ails you?" demanded Big John.

"Why, the chimney's *hot!*" exclaimed Merton. "Somebody's been here, and they haven't been gone very long, either."

"Thunder! It must have been Ross and Kinky. They were to meet us here, you know, and Ross had a key to the boathouse."

"If they were here a few minutes ago," went on Merton, "why aren't they here now?"

"I'll have to pass that. But if any one was here, it was those pals of mine. Go on and light the lamp. Use your handkerchief for taking off the chimney."

Matt, under the overturned boat, drew a breath of relief. But it was only a temporary relief. Already he was wondering what would happen when Ross and Kinky arrived at the rendezvous. Ross had told Matt that he and Kinky were to meet Big John that night, but had carried the impression that the meeting was to take place in town.

Merton's fears were apparently relieved, and he soon had the lamp lighted.

Big John divested himself of a raincoat and removed a dripping cap. Coat and cap he hung very carefully from two nails in the wall.

Merton, meanwhile, was unlocking a cupboard. A bottle and two glasses came out of the cupboard. Merton poured some of the liquor into the glasses. Big John reached over and emptied part of Merton's glass into his own.

"That leaves enough for you, son, and a heap more than you ought to have," said he. "It ain't good for younkers—nor for old fellers, either."

"Oh, splash!" grunted Merton. "You ought to go around with a pocketful of tracts," he grinned. "Whenever you rob a man, leave a tract with him."

"You're mighty cute," observed Big John, setting his empty glass on the table and leaning back in his chair, "but the two of us wasn't cute enough to get the best of Motor Matt. There's a boy! He's a bright and shinin' example. He has backcapped me twice, and the more he does it the more I admire him."

Merton stared; then, developing his silver cigarette case and his silver match box, he proceeded to smoke.

"You're a queer fish, Big John," said he. "If you've got such high standards, why don't you live up to 'em?"

Big John shook his head gloomily.

"I expect it ain't in me," he answered.

"If you'd had Ross and Kinky with you, there at the bend in the Waunakee road, this Motor Matt wouldn't have made a get-away."

"Mebby not; but Ross is down on Motor Matt and wouldn't hesitate to hand him his finish. That's the reason I wouldn't have Ross along; and I let Kinky stay with Ross as a sort of safeguard, in case anythin' went crossways and Ross happened to find Motor Matt. Only the hope of me gettin' that money has caused Ross to hold back as long as he has. Now that he knows there's no hope of gettin' the money, he'll be as mad as a cannibal. Ross is worse'n an Apache Injun when he's worked up."

"Then he'll be mad when he comes here and finds you didn't get the money, won't he?"

"He will; and I've laid my plans to make a quick jump for the West. I'll land that precious Ross where he won't get us all into trouble."

"You were telling me that you had set old man Lorry against Motor Matt."

A slow grin worked its way over Big John's face.

"Anonymous letter," said he. "I just wrote Lorry that I was a detective, and didn't think it wise to put my information over my own name, see? Then I went on to tell him to look out for Motor Matt, and explained that he was in cahoots with the three desperate scoundrels who had stolen the ten thousand in 'Frisco. That'll make Lorry think a little. But see here, son. You haven't been private adviser for young Lorry just to make a man of him in the gamblin' line, have you? What's your graft? I'll bet it's more than getting him away from his mother's apron strings, and out of the sissy class."

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Merton's sinister face took on a crafty look.

"You're right," said he. "The Winnequa Club has a race in a few days. For reasons of my own, I intend to win that race. See? Lorry also wanted to have a boat in the race, and he's about the only one, apart from me, whose dad has money enough to furnish him with a boat that will make the rest of us climb. But old man Lorry isn't furnishing George with the boat." Merton chuckled. "When George asked me what he ought to do the time his father threatened to send him to military school, I told George to skip, and to get as far away as he could. That left me free to do as I wanted to in that motor-boat event."

Merton winked.

"H'm!" murmured Big John. "You're a foxy youngster. I'm not sayin' it's creditable in you, mind, but it shows sharp thinking, all right."

The three boys under the overturned boat were able to see and hear all that went on. When the conversation between Merton and Big John had proceeded that far, Matt heard a sharp breath escape Lorry's lips.

A few words, and Merton's despicable planning had been laid bare. Out of Merton's own mouth Lorry could judge him. This false friend, with whom Lorry had associated, and whose advice he had taken, had headed him toward irretrievable ruin.

"Oh, I can be foxy if I want to," said Merton. "All I want now is to make sure that Lorry doesn't get in that race."

"I guess you can be easy on that point," returned Big John dryly. "The old gent won't put up money for the boat on a bet. Motor Matt called on Lorry. I talked with Gus, the Lorry chauffeur, and he said there was a heap of coldness developed durin' the interview, and that when Motor Matt had left, Lorry used the telephone and asked police headquarters to have a plain-clothes man pick up his trail and follow him. The fly cop followed Motor Matt from Third Lake into Fourth, but lost him somewhere around the Mendota end of the Catfish. The last thing I did, before leaving Madison to come here, was to drop another unsigned letter in the mails for Lorry."

"What was that for?" asked Merton.

"I told Lorry that if he would cross Fourth Lake in the morning, and proceed up the Catfish as far as Whisky Creek, then leave the boat and walk up the creek for a mile, he would come to the place where Motor Matt was having McGlory keep his son. I reckon *that* will give Motor Matt something to think about. I'll not be here to see the fun, and I guess young King will get out of the scrape in his customary fashion, but it'll be something by way of remembering Big John. King has made me a lot o' trouble, and has beat me out of a pineapple plantation, and that's all I can do to rough things up for him. You see——"

Big John broke off suddenly. Some one else was approaching the boathouse. Matt, McGlory, and Lorry could hear the footsteps plainly.

Merton started to get up, but Big John lifted a restraining hand.

"If they're the ones we expect," said he, "they've got a key and can let themselves in. If they're not the ones we're looking for, then we don't want them here."

A key rattled in the lock just as Big John finished speaking. The next moment the door opened and two men blew in.

They were Ross and Kinky!

CHAPTER XIV.

That visit of Matt, McGlory, and Lorry to the boathouse was worth all the danger it had brought, even if it had resulted in nothing more than opening Lorry's eyes to the duplicity of his supposed friend.

But other things had developed that were highly interesting, as well as edifying.

Matt was astounded to learn that an anonymous letter had made the elder Lorry so bitterly hostile. If Lorry had put so much faith in one unsigned letter, surely he would have equal confidence in the second, and might be expected to cross the lake on the following morning and make his way to the cabin on the creek.

It was likewise refreshing to learn that Big John was intending to take his two pals and return to the West. Matt was not forgetting that Ross and Kinky had some three hundred dollars of his money, and before the flight something must be done to recover the funds.

But just then a common danger suggested that the boys must get away from the boathouse. There were four enemies against them, and at least three of the enemies were armed.

"We've got to get out of here, Joe," whispered Matt.

"Why not lay low till *they* get out?" returned the cowboy.

"It won't be possible. That hot lamp chimney is going to do the trick for us. Big John will mention it and ask Ross and Kinky why they left the boathouse and went out into the rain. Ross and Kinky will say they didn't; then there'll be talk and a hunt for intruders. We've got to make a dash for the open—and at once."

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"You've got it right, Motor Matt," murmured Lorry. "The quicker I can get away from here, the better I'll like it. I've learned a lot," and there was bitterness in Lorry's voice as he finished.

"Let's heave over the boat and make a dash for the back door," suggested McGlory. "We're rushin' straight into the dark, and, if we're quick, we can get clear before there's any shooting."

"That hits me," said Lorry.

"It's now or never, then," assented Matt. "Separate, just outside the boathouse, and then come together again at the launch. We'll go up to that cave you fellows found. You understand the plan, do you?"

"Yes," answered Lorry and McGlory.

"Then lay hold of the edge of the boat," went on Matt.

In their narrow quarters the three boys knelt, waiting for the word to lift the boat's edge from the skids and throw the hulk entirely over. It was not a large boat, and their strength was fully equal to the task they had set for themselves.

"*Now!*" hissed Matt.

Over went the boat with a crash. Startled yells came from the sitting room, followed by silence broken only by a rush of feet as Matt, Lorry, and McGlory darted toward the rear door.

"Stop 'em!" roared Big John.

"Guns!" cried Ross; "use your guns!"

McGlory halted and whirled. At the side of the boat he had found a small can of white lead, which was probably to do its part in giving the hull a coat of paint. When starting to run the cowboy had taken the can of lead with him.

He paused to hurl the can. Straight as a bullet it shot through the air, crashed into the lamp, and plunged the interior of the boathouse in darkness. Another moment and McGlory had hurled himself through the door.

Acting upon Matt's suggestion, the three friends separated as soon as they reached the outside air. Ten minutes later they were all together again at the place where the *Sprite* was moored.

There was a lull in the storm, and for a while, at least, the rain had stopped.

Matt began ripping off the boat's tarpaulin cover.

"Cast off the painter, Joe," he called, as he worked. "You can help me with this, George," he added. "Never mind the skiff—we can't bother with that now."

Clearing a working space aft of the hood, Matt leaped into the boat and began getting the motor into action. George finished removing the "tarp," and McGlory scrambled aboard with the end of the painter.

From the direction of the boathouse sounds of pursuit could be heard.

"Tumble in, George," called Matt. "You can finish that from inside the boat."

McGlory gave his cousin a hand and Matt started the propeller.

Taking the launch up the river on such a night was hazardous in the extreme. But Matt had the bearings of the stream in his head, and he urged the *Sprite* boldly onward.

From behind them, somewhere, a revolver was fired. The leaden missile caused no damage, and the launch rushed on into the gloom.

Lorry, who knew the river well, pushed to Matt's side to be of what help he could.

"You never had a better chance to wreck a boat, Motor Matt," said Lorry, "than you've got right now."

"I'm hoping for the best," returned Matt. "Instinct, more than anything else, is guiding me. I don't know, but I seem to *feel* it when we're going wrong."

It was the same instinct, perhaps, which carries a horse over the right road when the rider is lost, or that carries a bird miles and miles through the air to the same nest in the same tree of the forest.

This was not the first time Matt had profited by that vague intuition. It was almost like a sixth sense.

McGlory, time and again, held his breath, fearing that they were about to run upon the rocks; but, just as surely, time and again, the king of the motor boys turned the wheel and deep water remained under them.

"It's up to you fellows to tell me where to stop," said Matt.

"I'm watching for the place," replied Lorry, "but the shore line looks like a solid blur of shadow. I can't distinguish one point from another."

"Figure it out by dead-reckoning," suggested Matt. "You must have some idea, George, how far the cave is from the lake."

"Two miles, I should say."

"Then, at this speed, we've covered the two miles," and Matt shut off the power and let the boat's momentum carry her toward the bank.

The *Sprite* came to a halt with a slight jar, which proved that she had struck.

"That's all right," announced Matt, "and we're close enough to tie up. Never mind if we do get our feet wet; we're in luck to get out of that boathouse as well as we did."

"You can gamble the limit on that," answered McGlory, splashing ashore with the painter. "I'm a Digger, too, if this place don't look familiar to me, what little I can see of it."

"It's familiar to me, too," exulted Lorry. "Why, fellows, we're within a hundred feet of the cave! Talk about luck, will you? This lays over anything that ever came my way."

Matt replaced the tarpaulin, got over the side, and waded to the bank. Lorry and McGlory led him upward for a dozen feet to a place where the bank broke away in a sort of narrow shelf. Something like a hundred feet along this shelf was the opening into the cavern. The entrance was masked with hazels, but the boys crowded in, and soon found themselves in dry quarters.

"Speak to me about that boathouse, please!" guffawed the cowboy, stretching himself out on the uneven stone floor. "Were Big John and his pals surprised! I rather guess they were."

"Tell us more about that attempt Big John and Merton made to rob you on the Waunakee road," said Lorry. "It seems strange that Merton should have a hand in anything like that, or that he should be mixed up with this gang of scoundrels at all. Merton's folks are immensely wealthy. They're traveling in Europe now, and Merton is in Madison attending the university. Mert is a spender, all right, and all he has to do when he wants money is to ask for it. Why should he help Big John try to get that ten thousand from you, Matt?"

"Possibly it wasn't the money end of the deal that attracted Merton," answered Matt. "It may be that all he wanted, Lorry, was to make you as much trouble as he could."

Lorry muttered angrily under his breath.

"I don't know how I ever let him pull the wool over my eyes," said he, "but it's a fact that I considered Ollie Merton my best friend. It was by his advice that I took that money and went to 'Frisco."

"That, alone," remarked Matt earnestly, "proves that Merton was not a friend."

"I'm beginning to see it in that light myself," admitted Lorry. "It's hard to have to say so, but it's the truth."

"Hard!" scoffed McGlory. "Why, pard, the way you're showin' up is sure hard to beat. But don't hang fire with that yarn of yours, Matt. You've got ours, and all George and I need is a statement of facts from you in order to get the whole business straight in our own minds. Heave ahead now, and be quick about it. I'm about ready to doze off."

Matt began with his start for Waunakee, related the attempted robbery, and the manner in which he and Ethel Lorry had backed the runabout along the Waunakee road and into Madison.

The part Matt dreaded to tell had to do with his interview with Lorry's father; but Lorry had shown such a surprising change in his whole manner of thought and action that Matt detailed the conversation between himself and Mr. Lorry exactly as it had occurred.

A few days before, such a report would have sent George into a furious tirade against his father, but he now listened quietly and without comment.

Matt, highly pleased, proceeded to tell how he had taken the launch from the express office, had engaged Pickerel Pete, and had run the *Sprite* into Fourth Lake and up the Catfish; then followed his visit to the cabin, his failure to find McGlory and Lorry, his return to the launch, his capture by a ruse on the part of Ross, and, finally, the murderous attempt which Ross had made and

which had come so near being successful.

"That Ross must be bug-house!" growled McGlory angrily.

"He had been drinking," said Matt. "A man will do things when he's partly intoxicated that he wouldn't think of doing when sober."

"You're out three hundred dollars, Matt," spoke up Lorry, "and I don't think that money will ever come back to you. When we made that dash from the boathouse, Big John and his pals knew we had been there long enough to learn a whole lot about their plans. Ross and Kinky have discovered that you were saved from the burning boat, even if they didn't know it before, and all three of the rascals will not lose a minute getting away from this part of the country. I doubt if it would do any good for us to go to Madison and report to the police. Big John and his pals are done with Madison, and with you. They'll make tracks for where they came from, and they'll do it at once."

"That sounds like pretty good reasoning to me," observed Matt, "but I guess that what we've accomplished is worth all it cost us. What are your plans, Lorry?"

"I'm going home in the morning," declared Lorry. "If I'm to go to a military school—well, there are worse places."

"Listen to George!" cried McGlory. "Oh, tell me about George! Ain't he a surprise party, though?"

"Now," said Matt jubilantly, "I'm *sure* that what we've accomplished is worth the price. Good night, pards. I've found a soft stone, and I've got material for pleasant dreams, so I'm going to sleep. In the morning, we're for across the lake—and Aristocracy Hill!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE POWER BOAT—MINUS THE POWER.

The boys were astir early, it being their intention to reach Madison and the Lorry home before Mr. Lorry could get away to cross the lake—providing that proved to be his intention.

The boys had a frugal breakfast off the cold food McGlory and Lorry had brought from the cabin, and immediately after they emerged from the cave upon the narrow shelf that ran in front of it.

The rain seemed to be over, and the leaden clouds were being scattered by a fierce wind from the west.

"This is a bad morning to be on Fourth Lake," said George, casting an anxious eye upward. "I had hoped the wind would blow itself out, but it appears to be as strong as ever."

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"Why not leave the *Sprite* here," suggested McGlory, "and hike for Madison along the wagon road?"

"It would take us too long," protested Matt. "I think a boat that can stand the seas in 'Frisco Bay ought to be able to negotiate this fresh-water lake. The *Sprite's* reliable, I can say that for her; and, so long as we have power, I guess we needn't fear the wind."

"We'd better have a look at the boat by daylight," said McGlory. "For all we know, pards, the end may have been burned off her."

But an examination showed that the *Sprite* had suffered little damage from the fire. The luggage was thrown aboard and the boys climbed to their places. One turn of the flywheel and the cylinders took the spark; then, on the reverse, the boat was pulled from the shoal into deep water, Matt changed to the forward drive, and they were off in a wide circle that pointed them for Lake Mendota.

"I don't care a whoop what happens now," gloried the cowboy, "we've got George out of the woods, and that's the main thing."

"Call it that if you want to, Joe," said Lorry, "but there's music for me to face, over on Fourth Lake Ridge."

"And you're goin' to face it like a little man, Georgie; and if Uncle Dan don't back down on that military-school proposition he'll get a cold blast from Joe McGlory. And that, pards," the cowboy added, "is a shot that goes as it lays."

"I'll take my medicine and not make much of a face, no matter how bitter the dose is," went on George; "but there's one thing that's bound to happen."

"Meanin' which, George?" inquired McGlory.

"Why, my father is going to be set right on the subject of Motor Matt."

"Don't let me cause any friction between you, George," urged Matt. "The breach between you and your father is in a fair way of being healed."

"So far as I am concerned," said Lorry, a flush tinging his cheeks, "I'm willing to admit that I acted like a fool. I'll go on record with that, face to face with the governor; I'll even go further and say that it was weakness that made me hang back from Madison, stop in that cabin, and send Motor Matt on to make a dicker and save my pride. But the governor has got to understand that Motor Matt's my friend, and that, but for him and you, Joe, I'd not be here now. Right is right,

and Motor Matt is going to have justice, if nothing more."

"I'm glad as blazes, George," caroled McGlory, "to hear you tune up in that fashion. The more I listen to you, since last night, the better I feel."

"I was quite a while getting to sleep in that cave," pursued Lorry. "I lay there, on the hard rocks, and reviewed everything I've done since leaving Madison. It seems as though a fog had been cleared out of my brain, and that I was able to stand off and get a clean-cut, impersonal look at myself. The sight wasn't pleasing. I know why Motor Matt suggested that stop at Waunakee, and a probation in the cabin on the creek. He read me better than I could read myself. He knew that I had pride which would not suffer humiliation and disgrace, and that if I was not pampered and humored a little I would probably go off on another rebellious splurge—and wind up my future prospects. By staying at that cabin, I brought all these dangers upon Matt; and yet, if he had not suggested some such move as the halt at Waunakee, I should very likely have bolted from the train between 'Frisco and here. Oh, what an unreasoning idiot I have been!"

Lorry dropped down on a seat and bowed his head in his hands.

"Speak to me about this, Matt!" whispered McGlory, placing himself alongside the king of the motor boys. "Who'd ever have dreamed my haughty, high-and-mighty cousin would ever have come to the scratch in such a way? Sufferin' tyrants! I wonder if Uncle Dan is going to do the right thing by George, or make as big a fool of himself as George did?"

"I think Mr. Lorry, after he sees and talks with George, will do the right thing," returned Matt.

Just here the *Sprite* shot out of the river into the rolling waters of Fourth Lake. The west wind, marshaling its strength on the broad sweep of the prairies, caught up the waves and flung them headlong toward Maple Bluff. The launch leaped and staggered, shoved her bow into the highest waves, and then shivered and flung off the spray in a double cataract on each side.

It was a nerve-tingling ride, and McGlory suddenly made up his mind that his stomach would feel better if he sat down.

George, his face flushed with excitement, looked around him and gave a jubilant shout.

"Great!" he cried.

"I wish I felt like that," groaned McGlory. "For Heaven's sake, Matt, see how quick you can get us to the other side."

"We can tie up at the yacht club on the west shore," said Lorry.

"All right," answered Matt. "Look at that boat over there, George," he added, nodding his head in the direction of Governor's Island. "She's the only other boat on the lake, so far as I can see, and she's acting as though something is wrong with her."

Lorry stood up, braced himself, and peered ahead.

"She's a bigger boat than ours," he remarked, "and looked to me like the *Stella*. The *Stella* is a thirty-footer, and belongs to Barkley Cameron, a neighbor of ours up on the Hill. By Jupiter," he added, a few moments later, "it is the *Stella*, and she's in trouble, as sure as you're a foot high." [Pg 27]

"The wind is driving her toward the Bluff," said Matt excitedly. "Her engine's dead—she hasn't any power to fight the wind and waves."

"And there are four men aboard her," went on Lorry. "Great Scott! If they ever go on those rocks at the point, the boat will be smashed to kindling and every one aboard of her drowned. Let's stand by the *Stella*, Matt, and try and do something for her."

"I'm rushing the *Sprite* in the *Stella's* direction," answered Matt, "and have been for some time. But we may not be able to do anything. She's half a mile nearer the rocks than we are, and she may go onto them before we can overhaul her."

Far off, just beyond the drifting and helpless launch, Matt and Lorry could see the white waves flinging themselves against the jutting crags of McBride's Point. The *Sprite* was coming up with the *Stella* hand over fist, but the *Stella's* drift was carrying her toward the cliffs with tremendous speed.

"I can see the people on board," cried George, "and two of them are tinkering with the engine. If they can get the motor in shape they're all right, but if they can't—"

George broke off abruptly, and stood clinging to Matt and staring at the other boat with frenzied eyes. Two of the *Stella's* passengers, as Matt could see, were looking toward the *Sprite* and waving their hands frantically.

"Matt," called George huskily, "one of those men is my father!"

"Great guns!" gasped Matt. "He started across the lake in the *Stella*. We didn't leave the Catfish quick enough. But keep your nerve, George. We're going to save them if we have to run into the breakers and pull the *Stella* off the cliff!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A RECONCILIATION.

McGlory aroused himself for a moment, and learned what the excitement was all about. Straightway he forgot his physical ills and became absorbed in the wonderful race Motor Matt was running with death. By every trick in his power the king of the motor boys was doing his utmost to urge the *Sprite* onward. The boat's speed became a terrific dash, a headlong hustle, with wind and wave helping the propeller.

"We'll never make it!" groaned George.

"Buck up, George!" cried McGlory. "Motor Matt has done harder things than this."

"But the *Stella* will be on the rocks before we can get to her! And there's the governor, likely to meet his fate right under my eyes! Oh, what a scoundrel I have been! Seeing the governor like this, perhaps for the last time, makes me realize what I have done. He was crossing the lake to find me, Joe."

George's voice died to a whisper and ended in a dry sob.

"Pull yourself together, I tell you!" roared McGlory. "Now's the time to show yourself a *man*!"

"Yell to them to stand ready to throw a rope," said Matt, between his teeth. "We can't get alongside of them before they hit the rocks, but we can come near enough so we can catch a rope if there's a strong enough arm to pass it."

Lorry cast aside his overpowering doubts and fears and flung himself into the fight with demoniacal energy.

"Stand ready with a rope!" he yelled, trumpeting through his hands and doing his best to make his voice heard above the roar and crash of the waves.

Again and again he repeated it, and McGlory joined in, timing his voice with his cousin's.

One of the men who had been working at the engine suddenly left his thankless labor and placed himself well forward on the *Stella* at the point nearest to the approaching *Sprite*.

"Make ready to grab the rope, both of you!" shouted Matt. "If you're lucky enough to grab it, take a half-hitch around the stern stanchion, and lay back on the end of the rope with every ounce of power in your bodies! There, stand by! They're going to throw!"

Matt shifted the wheel and, for a minute, placed the *Sprite* broadside on to wind and waves. This gave the man with the rope a better mark.

Out shot the coil of hemp, but the resistance of the wind caused it to fall pitifully short.

A cry of despair went up from Lorry.

"Once more!" yelled McGlory, as Matt pointed the *Sprite* straight for the *Stella* and flung her onward.

The man rapidly coiled the rope in his hands. Another man stepped forward and took the rope to make the next cast himself. He was a more powerfully built man than the one who had attempted the first cast.

"This will tell the story," cried George. "If this throw fails the *Stella* will be smashed to pieces on the bluff."

Matt and McGlory knew that fully as well as Lorry; and those on the *Stella* must have realized it.

The man with the rope was cool and deliberate. It was plain he was not going to waste any valuable chances by undue haste; then, as he was whirling the rope to let it fly, Matt again turned the *Sprite* broadside on.

For an instant it looked as though the rope was again to fall short; but Lorry, stretching far out from the side of the *Sprite*, snatched the end of the rope out of the air with convulsive fingers, and fell with it to the bottom of the boat.

A faint cheer went up from those on the *Stella*.

But the battle was not yet won. McGlory went to the assistance of Lorry, and the slack of the cable was jerked out of the water. This gave sufficient rope for a half-hitch around the stanchion and a firm hand hold. The cowboy and his cousin lay back on the line, bracing their feet against the thwarts and clinging with all their strength.

Motor Matt, meanwhile, had been busy with his part of the work. The instant the rope was made fast, he had shifted the bow of the *Sprite*, switching off the power for a moment in order to lessen the shock when the launch should begin to feel the pull.

Yet even with this precaution the shock was tremendous. But nothing gave way, and slowly but surely the *Sprite* took up her burden.

For a few moments the two boats seemed to stand stationary, the power of the *Sprite* just counterbalancing the push of wind and wave against both boats; then, a little later, the *Sprite* began to move, gathering headway by slow degrees.

Anything like speed was out of the question, but the *Sprite*, without missing a shot, plowed her way like a tugboat through the churning waters, and brought herself and her tow safely along the yacht club's pier.

Matt and McGlory, busy making the *Sprite* fast, caught a glimpse of George rushing across the pier to meet his father.

"George!" shouted the elder man.

"Dad!" cried George.

And they came together, gripping each other's hands. With arms locked they walked the length of the pier and vanished inside the yacht club's headquarters.

"Reconciliation?" queried McGlory. "If it isn't, I don't know the brand. Oh, I reckon Uncle Dan will do the right thing by George. That cold blast of mine will have to be permanently retired. Matt, give us your paw! This is a grand day for the Lorry tribe!"

"No doubt about that, Joe," answered Matt, with feeling, as he and McGlory shook hands.

Half an hour later Matt went into the yacht club to telephone police headquarters about his stolen money. He had only a very faint hope of ever seeing the money again, but he felt it his duty to do everything possible to recover it.

Over the 'phone he gave a description of Big John, Ross, and Kinky.

The man at the other end of the line had just promised to do what he could when Matt was caught by a strong hand and turned around. He was once more face to face with Lorry, Sr. But there was a difference in the Lorry of Matt's first and second meeting.

"By gad!" cried Lorry, "I want to shake hands with a hero. Nobly done, young man! But for you we'd have gone to smash against Maple Bluff, every last one of us on the *Stella*. We had our little differences when we met, that other time, Motor Matt, but I didn't understand the matter then. George here has been telling me how much he owes to you, how much I owe to you, how much I owe to him, and we all owe to McGlory, and everybody owes to everybody else. Gad! my head is fair splitting with it all. Never mind that three hundred that was taken away from you; I guess"—and the rich man laughed—"that my bank account is good for three hundred. I'll see that *you* don't lose anything. We'll have more talk about this later."

Lorry, Sr., turned to where McGlory was standing, at Matt's side, his black eyes gleaming humorously.

"Ah, Joe, you rascal," went on Lorry, placing two hands on the cowboy's shoulders, "you've done something to make us all proud of you—and I guess you'll find it out before you're many days older."

"What are you going to do for George, uncle?" queried McGlory.

"You watch! Keep your eyes skinned and you'll see me do something for you as well as for George."

Lorry, Sr., pushed himself between Matt and McGlory and caught each of them by an arm.

"Come on, my lads!" said he, "you're both going up to the house with George and me. This is a happy day, and the Lorrays are going to celebrate. Naturally, the celebration won't be complete without Motor Matt and Joe. Never mind your boat—I've asked the people here to look after it. Gus is outside with the big car, and all we've got to do is to get in and strike out for home. *Home!* How does that sound to you, my son?"

"It has a truer ring, dad," answered George, "than it ever had before."

"Maybe it's a different home, George," answered Mr. Lorry. "Anyhow, we'll try to make it so."

THE END.

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OR,

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THE GUARDIAN OF THE PASS.

It was the sudden change in the color of the water that made Nick Salvesson realize something was wrong.

All day thunder had been muttering far up in the mountains, but down in the river valley the autumn sun had been shining warm; and, busy with his fishing, Nick had paid no attention to the heavy clouds which hung over the jagged peaks upstream.

Suddenly the water lost its crystal clearness, and turned to a yellow, muddy hue, and the canoe began to strain at her anchor rope.

"Reckon it's about time to quit," muttered the young fellow; and, hastily reeling in his line, he laid the rod down and set to work to pull up the anchor.

It was badly jammed between two rocks at the bottom. By the time he had cleared it the river had risen at least two feet, and was roaring down in a sheet of muddy foam.

"Guess there's been a cloud burst up in the hills," said Nick to himself as he turned the bow of the canoe upstream.

He was not uneasy. He had spent the whole summer in Alaska, and could handle a canoe as well as most boys of his age.

He had been anchored close in under the far bank. To reach his camp he had to cross the whole width of the river, and return nearly a mile upstream.

But he had not taken six strokes before he realized that two strong men could not have paddled the canoe back against the flood that was now coming down. The only thing to do was to get across, land anywhere he could, pull the canoe up, and walk back.

"Great ghost! but it's strong," he muttered, as, in spite of his efforts, the bow of the canoe was swung sideways by the weight of the water.

He leaned forward, drove the paddle deep in the yellow flood, and, with all his weight in the stroke, attempted to force her round.

Crack! The paddle, worn thin with weeks of hard wear, snapped like a pipestem. Nick was left with a mere foot or so of useless stump. The blade was gone.

Instantly the rising flood seized the canoe and sent her flying madly downstream. Like a feather she danced and spun among the whirling yellow eddies.

Recovering from the sudden shock of the accident, Nick made a desperate effort to steer inshore by using the stump of the paddle. It was useless. The flood, rising every minute, mocked his best efforts.

At last, streaming with perspiration, and with his heart beating like a hammer, he gave it up, and sat grimly quiet and silent. There was something of the stoicism of the Indian in this son of a San Francisco millionaire. He had done his best. Now the only thing was to wait and see what the river would do with him.

Mile after mile the relentless current bore him flying westward. Soon he was past all his landmarks, and speeding through country completely unknown to him. Once or twice the river contracted dangerously between walls of rock, and the canoe pitched and plunged among foam-tipped waves. But for the most part the banks were hillsides covered with primeval forest of fir and hemlock. There was nowhere any sign of man.

"It'll take me all my time to get back even if I do manage to hit the bank somewhere," said Nick to himself grimly, as he noted the tangled thickness of the woods on either hand.

He was in a tight place; he knew that. What he hoped was that some freak of the current would drive the canoe near enough to the bank to catch hold of a branch and so pull himself ashore.

But this did not happen, and, after his mad flight had lasted for a full hour, Nick became desperately anxious. In the distance, he could see that the valley narrowed greatly, and he more

than suspected that he was approaching dangerous rapids.

He swung round a curve. Yes, he was right. Barely half a mile away the whole river plunged into a gorge so narrow it looked like a mere crack in the cliff. The shriek of the tortured waters rang high above the roar of the flood which bore the canoe onward to its doom.

Nick was no fool. He knew that in all human possibility his fate was sealed. No craft that man ever built could hope to pass in safety down the raging flood that boiled through that rift in the mountain.

"Rotten luck!" he muttered. "Well, there's one comfort—there's no one to miss me except old Rube, and I don't remember I ever did any one a dirty trick in my life."

Every instant the scream of the rapids grew louder. Nick could see the mouth of the rift and the yellow waves heaping themselves high against the black precipices on either hand.

On flashed the canoe. Every moment her speed increased. She was a bare one hundred yards from the top of the rapids, when a yell from the right-hand bank rose high above the thunder of the flood, and Nick, turning his head, saw a small, slight figure dashing down through the trees.

Just above the gate of the rapids half a dozen great boulders showed their black heads above the yellow foam. Without a moment's hesitation the stranger leaped from the bank to the nearest, and so from rock to rock, till he stood far out near the centre of the raging river.

Nick watched him with straining eyes. Was there still a bare chance? No! At that moment an eddy swept the canoe away to the left. With a groan Nick realized that she would pass far out of reach of his would-be rescuer.

The canoe shot like an arrow toward the lip of the fall. Nick waved the broken stump of his paddle in farewell to the figure on the rocks.

The latter's right arm whirled up, and, with a sharp hiss, a coil of rope flashed out and dropped clean and true across the canoe.

Nick snatched at it with the energy of despair. As it tightened, the canoe was drawn away from under him, and he, dragged over the stern, was struggling in the rushing water.

A minute of gasping, stifling battle among the tumbling, roaring waves. The strain on the rope was so tremendous that it seemed to Nick that either it must break or the man who held it must be pulled off his slippery perch.

But neither happened, and inch by inch the boy was drawn in, until a hand grasped him and pulled him, gasping and exhausted, onto the solid summit of the boulder.

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"Can you jump?" He heard an anxious voice. "The water's still rising. It'll be over the rock soon."

"You bet I can," replied Nick, struggling to his feet and shaking himself like a dog.

"Come on, then!" cried the other. And, sure-footed as a goat, he sprang across six feet of raging torrent to the next rock. Nick set his teeth and followed, and in another minute was safe ashore beside his rescuer.

"Mean to say you live here all alone!" exclaimed Nick Salvesson in blank amazement, as he looked round the bare little log hut a little later.

"Yes, for the last four months, ever since my father left."

"Did he go down to the coast?"

"I wish he had. No, he went inland, over the Big Snowies!"

"Great Scott! What for?" asked Nick bluntly.

"Gold," replied the other. "I'll tell you about it. My name's Glenn—Roger Glenn. We came here a year ago prospecting. We heard there was gold down here, but we didn't do much, and an Indian who was snowbound here last winter told my father that there was rich placer ground the other side of the mountains."

"But no one's ever been across there," objected Nick. "There's no pass."

"The Indian told us there was. He made a map. Here's a copy of it."

"So your dad tried it?" said Nick, staring curiously at the rough map.

"He went the first of June last, and I've not seen or heard of him since. He said he'd be back in six or eight weeks."

"Gee, but that's bad," replied Nick sympathetically. "What do you reckon you are to do?"

"What can I do?" cried young Glenn bitterly. "I'm mad to go after him, but I haven't a red cent to grubstake myself or buy a pony or dogs or a sledge."

Nick stared in silence at the other for some seconds. Then he said slowly:

"Say, Mr. Glenn, that flood may have done us both a good turn. What d'ye say to taking me along in your trip over the Snowies?"

Roger stared violently.

"B-but—" he began.

"No 'buts' about it. I'm running this outfit. Look here, Roger—I guess you don't mind my calling you by your first name—I'm pretty well fixed. My people are dead; they were killed in the

earthquake in San Francisco. I'm my own boss, though I am only eighteen, and I came up to Alaska this summer to get a holiday before I go to the university next Christmas. There isn't a thing I'd like better than a trip over the Snowies, and if we're smart we'll do it and be back before winter hits us. Are you agreeable?"

"I don't know how to thank you," said Roger brokenly.

"Then don't worry to try, old man," replied Nick comfortably. "Just fix up a mouthful of grub, and give me a bunk. We ought to start before sun-up to-morrow morning."

"Seems to me, Rube, you were a bit out in your reckoning," said Nick as early one morning, ten days later, he looked out of the tent and found the landscape white with snow.

Rube shook his grizzled head.

"'Tain't that altogether, boss. I reckon we're a matter of four thousand feet higher than your summer camp. Winter comes here a sight sooner than down in them river valleys. Howsomever, it ain't deep, and it'll melt when the sun gets good an' strong."

All that day the little party of three struggled up a narrow valley that wound ever upward into the heart of a maze of great snow peaks. Over and over again tall cliffs loomed up in front, and it seemed as if they could go no further. But always there appeared some fresh opening, and bit by bit they won their way upward toward the summit of the range.

"I reckoned as I knew this here country's well as any," said Rube, staring thoughtfully up at a tremendous pyramid peak, the snow on which was gold and crimson in the light of the setting sun. "But this beats me. 'Tain't on any map as ever I seed."

"The Indian said no white man had ever crossed it," said Roger.

"Hed he bin across hisself?" inquired Rube.

"No. He told dad that none of his tribe had ever been across. And when dad asked him why, he only shook his head, and said something about its being the country of two-tailed devils."

"How did he know of this here pass then?" demanded Rube.

"The map was given him by his father. It had come down goodness knows how many generations. He tried awfully hard to persuade dad not to go."

"They've got a mighty queer lot of legends about these mountains," put in Nick. "You couldn't pay any Injun I ever saw to put foot on 'em."

They camped that night in bitter cold and deep snow on the very summit of the pass. Rube took Nick aside.

"Say, boss, do you reckon we're ever going to find Roger's dad?"

Nick shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know. Roger says that before he left his father told him he'd blaze a trail, so as if anything went wrong his son could come along after. Roger found his father's mark on a tree near the eastern end of the pass."

"Seems to me the chances are ez something hez happened to old Glenn," said Rube thoughtfully. "Chewed by a b'ar, I reckon. Or maybe had a fall. It's a fool job fer any man to come into country like this by hisself."

"I guess I'm going as far as Roger wants," said Nick, "Seeing what he's done for me, it's about the least I can do for him."

"You're right, boss," said Rube. "He's a real white, that boy is!"

"If we don't find his father, I'm going to take him back to the States," said Nick. "But that's a bit o' news you can keep to yourself for the present."

Next morning the sun shone brilliantly on the snow, and, looking down, the party saw, thousands of feet below them, an unknown country covered with a forest heavier than any of them had ever seen before.

"Mighty curious-looking country this," observed Rube doubtfully, as they slipped and slithered down the steep snow-covered rocks. "I don't reckon I ever seed woods as thick as them before."

"What's that queer-looking little plain halfway down?" asked Nick. "Looks like a clearing of some kind."

A smile crossed Rube's leathery face.

"Thet's a pond, boss. It's fruz over, an' the snow's laying thick on it."

Further down they came to a place where the only possible track lay along the bottom of a three-hundred-foot slope, steeper than the roof of a house and thick in snow, which glared blinding white in the morning sun. The opposite slope was covered with the amazingly thick forest which they had seen from above.

"Go keerful," said Rube. "'Twouldn't take a great deal to start a snowslide down them rocks."

"Seems as if something had been falling already," said Roger suddenly. "Look at these pits in the

snow."

He pointed to a hole in the snow. It was circular and about two feet deep.

"Now that's strange," exclaimed Nick. "There's a whole row of 'em."

Rube looked at the queer marks, grunted, and shook his head. He hadn't a notion what they were, but did not like to betray his ignorance to the boys. [Pg 31]

"Reckon best not talk," he growled. "Don't take much to start snow a-sliding."

For the next half mile no one spoke. Twice more Roger noticed a series of the same queer marks in the snow. Also in two places there seemed to be regular roads beaten back into the thick underbrush of the snowclad forest on their right. He did not pay much attention. His eyes were fixed on the tree trunks.

Suddenly he gave a shout.

"Dad's mark!" he cried, pointing to a blaze on a big trunk by the path.

The words were hardly out of his mouth before there came a deep crashing sound from somewhere behind.

"Yew've done it now!" cried Rube. "That's the snow!"

"Not a bit of it," retorted Nick. "It's coming from the wood."

"Blamed if you ain't right!" exclaimed Rube. "Thet beats all. I never heerd a snowslide come down through a wood afore."

"It's not snow; it's something alive!" shouted Roger. "For heaven's sake, look there!"

Rooted to the ground with sheer amazement, the three saw the forest wave as if it were grass, heard the crashing of great boughs and trunks breaking like nettles under a boy's stick.

There came a scream like the escape of steam from an express engine, and then there burst out from the forest a beast so huge and hideous that those who saw it stood gasping, unable to believe their eyes.

As large as a four-roomed cottage, in shape it resembled an elephant. It was covered all over with a thatch of coarse, reddish hair, and high above its monstrous head it waved a trunk of incredible size. On each side of this trunk curled vast tusks, and its small, bloodshot eyes glowed with bestial fury.

Again came that awful trumpeting. Instantly both the pack ponies were off at a mad gallop.

"Run!" shrieked Rube.

The warning was needless. Nick and Roger were off as hard as their shaking legs could carry them, and behind them came the monster at a shambling gallop, which, in spite of the snow, covered the ground at terrific speed.

Again he trumpeted, and one of the pack ponies, mad with fright, tried to wheel sideways into the wood. The poor brute slipped and fell, rolling over and over. Before it could regain its feet the monster was upon it, and, lifting pony, pack, and all, bodily in its trunk, flung it against the cliffside with such frightful force as must have broken every bone in its body.

The momentary delay gave the others a few yards' start; but almost instantly the gigantic brute was on their track again, and the solid ground shook beneath its ponderous weight as it thundered down the slope.

It could not last. The monster was gaining at every stride. Already Roger felt his breath failing. There was no cover; in fact, the pass was opening out wider and wider as they went.

"Try the trees!" shrieked Nick to Roger.

"No," came a gasp from Rube. "The lake! That's our only chance!"

They were close by the side of the little frozen lake, and the boys saw Rube wheel and dash down the steep bank.

It seemed madness, for on the open ice they were at the mad brute's mercy. Roger was for going straight on, but Nick seized his arm and swung him to the left and onto the lake.

Another of those ear-piercing squeals. Roger, glancing back over his shoulder, saw the gigantic bulk of their enemy come plunging down the sharp descent toward the ice. It rushed straight toward him as though certain of its prey.

Then came a rending crack, and the whole surface of the ice rose and fell beneath the feet of the fugitives. A crash like the explosion of a shell, a terrific bellow, and a wave of icy water rushed across the frozen snow.

"That's done it!" came an exulting yell from Rube; and, swinging round, the boys were just in time to see the domelike head of their terrible enemy sink amid a lather of broken ice and foam.

For another second or two that terrible trunk waved high in the air, as the huge beast fought for its ancient life in the hole its ponderous bulk had broken. Then this, too, vanished. The last of the mammoths had sunk into the depths.

While the three stood in awe-stricken silence, watching the black water heave and bubble, there came a loud shout from the woods at the far end of the lake. A burly man in furs stood waving a rifle.

With a shriek of joy Roger tore away across the ice toward him.

"Reckon that's his pa," observed Rube.

"Guess so," agreed Nick. "We might as well go and see."

"Dad!" cried Roger, as Rube and Nick came up. "If it hadn't been for these good friends I could never have come to look for you."

"Then," said the man in furs with a grave smile, "I'm afraid I should have been hung up here for the term of my natural life."

"What—did that old hairy elephant chase yer?" exclaimed Rube.

"He did, and I got away by the skin of my teeth by climbing a cliff," replied Mr. Glenn. "I've been living up in the hills ever since. Time and again I've tried to find another way out, but there isn't one, and for the life of me I didn't dare risk conclusions a second time with the mammoth."

"I reckon he won't trouble us no more," said Rube dryly. "Say, though, I'd like to have had them tusks. They'd be worth a mint o' money in the States."

"They'd be awkward to carry," smiled Mr. Glenn. "They'd weigh about a quarter of a ton apiece. What do you suppose they'd be worth?"

"A thousand dollars, I reckon," said Rube. Such a sum represented wealth untold to the old trapper.

Mr. Glenn put a hand in his coat pocket, and pulled out a lump of dull yellow metal as big as his fist.

"This isn't worth quite that much," he said quietly, as he handed it to Rube. "But I'd be glad if you'd take it as a sort of consolation prize."

"Great gosh! It's a twenty-ounce nugget!" gasped Rube.

"Yes, and plenty more where that came from," said the prospector.

He turned to his son.

"Roger, I've made the strike of a lifetime. Now to get back to Dawson before the snow comes."

WATCH THE SKY.

The different colors of the sky are caused by certain rays of light being more or less strongly reflected or absorbed, according to the amount of moisture contained in the atmosphere. Such colors do, therefore, portend to some extent the kind of weather that may naturally be expected to follow. For instance, a red sunset indicates a fine day to follow, because the air when dry refracts more red or heat-making rays, and as dry air is not perfectly transparent, they are again reflected in the horizon. A coppery or yellowish sunset generally foretells rain. The following has been advocated as a fairly successful way of prognosticating: Fix your eye on the smallest cloud you can see: if it decreases and disappears, the weather will be good; if it increases in size, rain may be looked for.

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Added table of contents.

Images may be clicked to view larger versions.

Page 1, Added comma after "Joe McGlory" in list of "Characters that appear in this story."

Page 10, restored missing period to last sentence of chapter VI.

Page 29, corrected "Rufe" to "Rube" ("miss me except old Rube").

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